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Oxford University Press



THE TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT

DECEMBER 4 1981

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Holding the Whig line

By J. P. Kenyon

J. W. BURROW:
A Liberal Descent
Victorian Historians and the English Past
308pp. Cambridge University Press.
£19.50.
0 521 24079 4

In a rare moment of lyricism, Herbert Butterfield once described the Whig Interpretation of History as "part of the landscape of English life, like our country lanes or our November mists or our historic inns". It was not the property of any one party, it was the English interpretation. What had begun as a narrow partisan assertion in the constitutional struggles of the late seventeenth century became in the nineteenth century a more generalized explanation of that native political compromise which was so highly esteemed in contrast to the violent excesses of lesser breeds without the law. As R. W. K. Hinton has said, the essence of the Whig view was that the development of the constitution was *fortunate*, "leading not to decay and death but to maturity and perfection", and that the events which led up to it were *correct*. (The sin of David Hume was to argue that many of the steps taken in the formation of the constitution were *incorrect*, in the sense of being illegal in the context of their time.)

John Burrow demonstrates the strength, the flexibility and the omnivorousness of the Whig tradition as it survived in the work of five nineteenth-century historians of very disparate types; and particularly in their interpretation of three key events in English history, the Norman Conquest, the Reformation and the Revolution of 1688. Macaulay was an active Whig politician almost to the end; Stubbs, Freeman and John Richard Green were "historical scholars with little or no experience of public affairs, with views of the present that were in varying degrees romantically historicised, and who were drawn to history by what was, in a broad and complimentary sense, an antiquarian passion for the past." It is difficult to be sure from their writings how the last three would have voted at elections, though, Stubbs was appointed to the Regius Chair at Oxford during the brief ministry of Lord Derby in 1866 on the assurance that his views were staunchly conservative, if not Tory. Froude is very much the fifth wheel on the carriage; a Tory radical who is really, as Burrow admits, in a line of succession that leads to the Hammonds and R. H. Tawney. He lacked that religious certitude, (or, in the case of Macaulay, spiritual philistinism), which distinguished the others; in fact, he represents the doubt, the angst, the waning of self-confidence, the blurring of intellectual markers, which is the other side of Victorian optimism.

Burrow himself suggests that his selection is not entirely representative, but of this I am not so sure. Gardiner would fit neatly enough between Stubbs and Macaulay, and I am surprised not to see him here. Seeley is an odd man out in some ways, but despite the fertility of his ideas and his suave exposition of them, he was not a major historian. Carlyle is the exception that proves the rule, but in fact jumbles all the categories. Burrow remarks that when we read Freeman and Macaulay, or even Stubbs, "the mental image of a plithoric Victorian tourist shouting at waiters in a foreign hotel is occasionally inescapable". The inescapable image of Carlyle is of a madman gibbering at the bars of his first-floor cell in some secluded Victorian asylum down a tree-lined suburban cul-de-sac.

Burrow's style, subtly inquisitive and highly literary, has now reached full maturity. Browsing over a wide range of material, he shuffles and re-shuffles the evidence to detect new correspondences or clarify old relationships, and under the pressure of his intelligence facts take on a new shape, from chapter to chapter. His

notes in passing, for instance, that a certain kind of Victorian tourist in Europe tended to see a relationship between religion and the material life:

The more progressive tendencies of Protestant communities spoke eloquently for the reformed religion, supplementing more purely theological considerations. The increasing diffusion and scope of continental travel provided material for an informal sociology of religion; the state of inns and beds brought opportunities for inductive

book to deal with, rather the opposite. The reviewer's pencil is out early and out often, and on a second reading I found that I had marked up something on almost every page. His own comment on Stubbs's *Constitutional History* is decidedly apropos: "An attempt to trace the book's contours for others is inevitably both more laborious and more superficial than one would wish; the outlines may be clear but the texture is lost."

That is not to say that I am entirely convinced by Burrow's general

comparative politics from the dawn of civilization onwards, he commented that the subject was "largish"; Freeman referred to the great German medievalist Liebermann as "Stubbs's Jew".) Moreover, apart from Macaulay, they all published their main work very much together, a fact disguised by the structure of the book which Burrow does not bring out until the end. Macaulay published the second part of his *History* in 1855, Froude began in 1856 and continued until 1870; Freeman published the *Norman Conquest* 1867-79 and Stubbs his *Constitutional*

ence of the great Romantic intellectuals, Newman, Carlyle and Thomas Arnold, and his values were formed by the Enlightenment. His immersion in the classics gave him a veneration for the stoic virtues evident in Tacitus, strong-willed, under-sexed men like William III and Wellington, who were indifferent alike to women and money, the two rocks which shipwrecked Marlborough, the Macaulayan anti-hero. Yet despite the sentimentalities of his *Lays of Ancient Rome* he had no sympathy with the concept of classical republicanism, towards which his attitude was almost Hobbesian.

He had a strange penchant for grading and comparing men, for making up historical First XIs. Freeman shared this "love of roll-calls of the great dead", (and so, rather strangely, did Acton). Burrow notes the "buried" quality of Macaulay's work, which encourages us to extend the metaphor, and imagine him as some latter-day Homer, hymning the triumphs of the race in the halls of the great Victorian thegns. Even Seeley admitted:

It is most right and desirable that there should always be historians of the type of Macaulay. Noble deeds should be told in splendid language; great events should pass before us in swelling and stately narrative.

But beneath this epic strain lay a cosier undertone of gossip. "The kind of gossip", says Burrow, "founded on shared reminiscence, found in united families and helping to make them so" - the fact that Schomberg in 1689, and Wellington in 1814, both received the thanks of the House of Commons on the same spot and with the same ritual, the fact that the Currency Debate of 1696 was invoked by Burke in 1796 and Huskisson in 1822, were instances of the past inhabiting the present, and emphasized the even, magisterial flow of English history. Taken too far, of course, this could end in bathos, with Macaulay interrupting his account of Argyle's Rising in 1685 to expatiate on the customs revenue of the modern port of Greenock, or eulogizing the prosperity hotel industry while describing William III's landing at Torbay.

But Burrow confirms the view put forward by Joseph Hamburger and others, that Macaulay was not merely a partisan Whig.

The *History* is much more than the vindication of a party; it is an attempt to insinuate a view of politics, pragmatic, reverent, essentially Burkean, informed by a high, even tawdry sense of the worth of public life, yet fully conscious of its interrelations with the wider progress of society; it embodies a sense of the privileged possession by Englishmen of their history, as well as of the epic dignity of government by discussion. If this was sectarian it was hardly, in any useful contemporary sense, polemically Whig; it is more like the sectarianism of English respectability.

To Stubbs the approach is necessarily different. As Burrow sympathetically remarks, "Horror of the facile ran deep in Stubbs's nature; it was a hard fate that made him so long an instructor of youth." It was also ironic that he could never command an audience for his lectures, and that his views on the proper role of professors made him an object of mistrust to most of his Oxford colleagues. Yet the book conquered, if not the man, for the influence of his *Constitutional History of England* on the teaching of history was overwhelming and sustained, moulding the syllabuses not only of Oxford but of virtually all English universities in the first half of the twentieth century. (Prothero and Lodge even imposed it on the hapless Scots.) In the Cambridge of the 1880s, as J. R. Tanner later recalled, "The lecturer lectured on Stubbs; the commentator elucidated him; the crammer boiled him down. Within those covers was to be found the final word on every



The expansion of literacy resulting from the invention of printing brought in its train demands for manuals of calligraphy, such as the Trattato di Penna, issued in 1640 by the Genoese writing-master Pisani, from which the example above is taken. It forms one of the illustrations to Peter Isen's recently published *Masterpieces of Calligraphy*: 261 Examples, 1500-1800 (about 200 unnumbered pages. Constable. Paperback, £4.50. 0 486 24100 9).

Protestant apologetics, and pyrrhic victories for the purer faith. Catholicism was clearly associated with poverty, flies, dirt and indolence, as well as priestcraft and intolerance.

He marks down the prevailing franco-phobia of the Whig historians, but distinguishes between Macaulay's fear of Jacobinism and Stubbs's and Freeman's aversion to centralized bureaucracy. Freeman blamed the French for corrupting the honest manliness of the Middle Ages with "the tinsel fripperies of chivalry", and at the same time the mere sight of "the word 'Préface' on a poster was enough to throw him into a bad temper".

It is a condensed style, sucking idea upon idea, meaning upon meaning, implication upon implication, down into an intellectual black hole; whence they are funnelled out the other end into a new world of lucidity - something which was not always so in Burrow's earlier book on Victorian Intellectuals, *Evolution and Society*. Freeman, for instance, is encapsulated in one long yet terse sentence - a mere prolegomenon to the main discussion - in which every word counts, and counts to the full:

Gruff pedant and country magistrate as he was, he was a Romantic in almost everything: in his *Schwärmerei* and his Byronic philhellenism, in the lush in-temperance of his libertarian rhetoric, in his racialist nationalism and sympathy with oppressed nationalities, in his Tacitean primitivism and populism, and in a note, seldom altogether silent in his historical writing, of apocalyptic excitement.

Burrow's wit is ever present but never obtrusive, and intellectually exact; as when he remarks that the Whig historians "had always stood at an uncomfortable angle to Tudor England".

But this does not make it an easy

argument. All the historians under review were Whigs, in the sense that they told a success story about English history, and they all had what he calls "a sense of connection with the English past, uninhibited by any sense of the past as alien and obscure." But their purposes were very different. Stubbs's motives were avowedly didactic or pedagogic, and it is doubtful how far his purpose extended beyond the narrow field of university education. Macaulay's motives were also partly didactic, though he was self-consciously addressing a much wider public; his was a mission of public re-education shared to some extent by Green. Freeman and Froude certainly, Macaulay possibly, also found in historical writing a relief from inner tensions, a working-out of their complexes. But Froude also had a powerful financial motive for writing history, as had Green and Macaulay, and book royalties formed a significant part of their income. Stubbs and Freeman were probably less influenced by such considerations, though David Knowles has pointed out that Stubbs in fact made an astonishing amount of money even out of the scholarly Rolls Series. Freeman was disappointed with his sales, but almost certainly not for financial reasons; he had a considerable private income and he cannot have expected to improve it with seven-volume extravaganzas like his *History of the Norman Conquest*.

Nor was there much intellectual communion between them. Freeman and Green were the closest of friends, but they differed fundamentally on important points. They were both on good terms with Stubbs, but at a distance; a distance probably imposed by Stubbs. Despite the old doggerel "Ladling butter from alternate tubs/Stubbs butters Freeman, Freeman butters Stubbs", it is to be doubted if Stubbs had much respect for Freeman's scholarship, or his view in general. (Told that Freeman was lecturing on

History 1874-78; Green's *Short History* appeared in 1874. Green relied a great deal, as he admitted, on Stubbs's earlier work, and to some extent on Freeman; otherwise they seem to have been independent entities. And though their earlier careers overlapped his, none of them seems to have had any contact with Macaulay. Stubbs thought him deeply suspect. "How can we recommend the man who wants to get up the facts of a case to a history like Macaulay's?", he once said. But Freeman revered him; in fact, Burrow suggests that at the bottom of Freeman's remarkable aversion to Froude was jealousy, because Froude and not he had picked up the torch Macaulay had dropped. Froude himself, of course, was a total outsider, spurned and derided in a remarkably petty way, even by Stubbs.

Obviously this was not a school of historians; not even Green and Freeman thought they were writing about the same things. The fact that Burrow can find correspondences at all in their work, and touches, or a general mental attitude, testifies to the strength of the Whig tradition. The book is therefore not really a case study, because we are presented with more than one case; it could more aptly be termed a meditation on the English past as it was interpreted by five distinguished men of letters.

Burrow begins, of course, with Macaulay, always acknowledged to be the archpriest of Whig historiography. Few historians can have been so much discussed, denounced, admired and analysed, yet the subtlety and discrimination of Burrow's approach lend an air of originality even to this jaded subject.

Despite Macaulay's debt to Scott, much emphasized in recent years, Burrow argues that this only earned the style and structure of his work, in spite of his "the most Augustan of the great Victorians". Unlike the historians who came after, he was untouched by the influ-

were made to conscious of "Special privilege" that, unlike their British counterparts, they "stood alone from the nation in general". In the field of warship design, Japanese vessels, with their obvious advantage of a single (if broadly) sphere of operation, could be constructed with a greater emphasis on their actual fighting role. As for the vital sphere of naval aviation, the Japanese began the conflict with superior aircraft, armed with superior torpedoes, and with air crews "steering ahead", in Marder's view, "of anything that the Royal Navy or its competitors could put up with". The Imperial Japanese Navy had also prepared assiduously for night actions. Its conception of the final show-down with the enemy, however, was still centred upon the anachronistic scenario of a daylight duel between the main fleets (as had occurred at Tsushima and Jutland), whilst the emphasis placed upon heroic aggression had led to the costly neglect of trade warfare, as regards both the protection of Japan's own merchant shipping and the destruction of that of her enemies.

These are merely a few of the points that emerge from Marder's extensive comparison. As for the images that each Service entertained of the other, he rightly observes that "the IJN evaluation of the Royal Navy was a lot closer to the truth than was the Royal Navy's evaluation of the Imperial Navy". An element of racism was clearly present in some British beliefs: that the Japanese, though courageous, were "slow-witted", for example, or that they were incapable of handling high-performance aircraft. When it comes to the ideas and attitudes of the Japanese Navy, however, Marder makes two assertions that are open to serious question: that the attention of that Navy in the years leading up to the war was so focused upon the US Navy that it had "little time for, and even less interest in, thinking through the problems of a war with Britain"; and that "the Imperial Navy went to war with Britain reluctantly". There were indeed, of course, those within the senior ranks of the IJN who continued to prize the long-standing association with their British counterparts. Yet by 1940-41 such men were in a minority, and were in the process of giving way to other officers, both of flag rank and lower, notable for their aggressive and anti-British attitudes. Marder himself quotes evidence to this effect, and acknowledges that "from the Tripartite Pact [with Germany and Italy in 1940] until the outbreak of war, the pro-war element had the upper hand

in the Navy Ministry and the Naval General Staff".

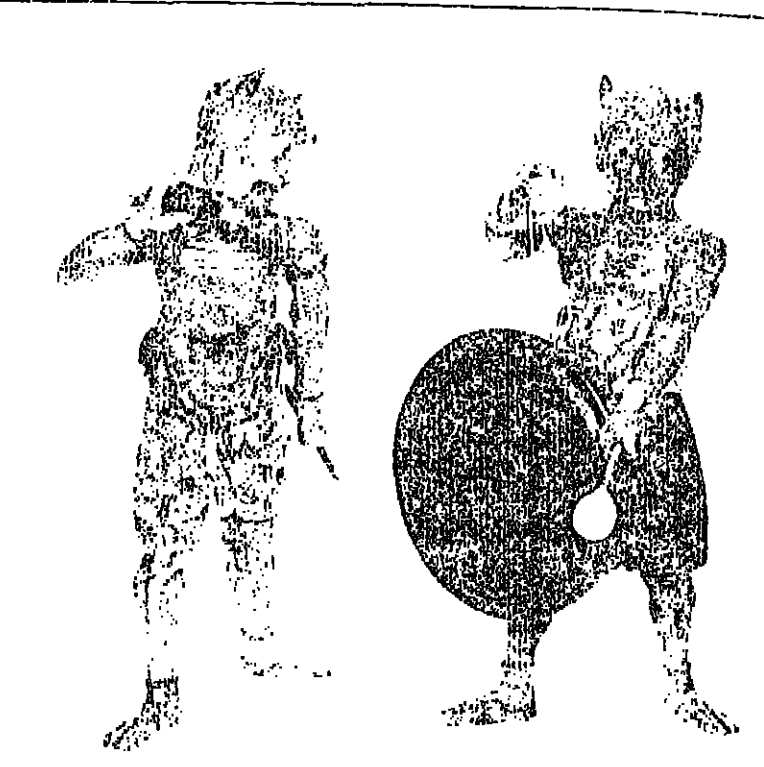
War with whom? Only fairly late in the day was it accepted that the United States would have to be included among those to be attacked, whereas the need to destroy the British presence in Southeast Asia had long been seen as an essential step towards securing the vital raw materials of the region. Again, Marder himself provides evidence which undermines his general assertion. For example, he approvingly quotes "the most authoritative study of the genesis of the [Tripartite] Pact" to the effect that in the Navy, as well as in the Army, those involved in studying the possibility "were already inclined to approve a triple military alliance against Britain". (Emphasis added.) Likewise, he places at the head of his first chapter a statement made in 1938 by an Australian naval officer who had been talking to IJN officers: "The Japanese hope to be able to fight England alone, and consider themselves quite ready to do so." (That he wished to do so, Marder could also have cited, for example, a dispatch sent to Berlin in June 1936 by the German Naval Attaché in Tokyo, Commander Paul Wencker:

On all my visits [to Japanese warship and shore establishments]... I was able to confirm, to my surprise, that by contrast with the period of more than six months before, when the whole Japanese Navy had still seemed to [view]... America as the only future opponent, of late a fundamental change of attitude has come about... America is no longer regarded exclusively as the future enemy, but now it is primarily England... The objective of Japanese policy must be to smash the [encircling] policy of England, cost what it may. [From an unpublished translation of the Attaché's War Diary and cables by Dr J. W. M. Chapman.]

It seems possible that Marder's confusion over these issues, and above all the comfortable assertions that appear in his Preface, spring from the extent to which he relied upon the testimony (perhaps of a somewhat bland kind?) of retired IJN officers. This technique of gathering opinions from the former great or former members of their staffs was of course a prominent feature of Marder's previous and celebrated studies of the Royal Navy. It played a significant part in his long-running dispute with Britain's Official Naval

Historian, Captain Stephen Roskill, over the role of Admiral of the Fleet Sir Dudley Pound, as First Sea Lord during the first part of the war (a dispute to which Marder returns in the present volume when he seeks to justify, less than convincingly in this reviewer's opinion, Pound's eventual giving way to Churchill over the dispatch to Singapore of the *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse*). Obviously, Marder also made extensive use of documentary sources in his work. Obviously, too, the testimony of those who were involved in an episode which he is exploring can be of value to the historian. And obviously, again, Marder's achievements as a student of British naval history were considerable, as was his courage in the face of adversity. Such has been the status some have bestowed upon his writings, however, that it seems necessary to indicate that those volumes do nevertheless invite questions involving, not simply some of the judgments they contain, but their author's approach as a whole. Dr Jon Sumida, in an article published in the *Journal of Modern History*, has already raised such questions over Marder's work on the Fisher period. Nor can they be ignored where the present volume is concerned, much as one would have preferred to be able to invite a response from Marder himself.

The crux of the matter is indicated by two of the author's statements that appear in *Old Friends, New Enemies*. One, quoted in an introductory, personal memoir of Marder by Peter Kemp, is to the effect that the historian should never criticize a person on the basis of knowledge not available at the time to the individual in question, and that his "task" is "to look at yesterday with the eyes of yesterday". The other is the declaration made by Marder himself in his Preface, that he brought "no theories of history to his research", and that he was "essentially a narrative historian". It is difficult not to see in such statements the suggestion that Marder was able to handle his material with a particularly high degree of objectivity; but whether or not this is a correct inference, questions arise at two levels. The first involves aspects of what Marder, his declaration made, offers his readers. Is it a matter of objective narrative or of debatable analysis, for example, when he states that "the origins of the Far Eastern war were cumulative and date back to the Manchurian and China incidents [of 1931 and 1937]? Or again, on what or on whose evidence (none is cited) does he base the assertion that "the ship's



This massive pair of guardian demons (toni) are to be included in a sale of Japanese works of art to be held on December 8 at Chiswick, 8 King Street, St James's, London SW1. They are each about 165cm high, are made of lacquered and painted wood and their terrifying aspect is increased by their moveable inlaid glass eyes.

company [of the *Prince of Wales*] was a mixed one, mostly 'hostilities only', and the latter could be difficult". (Emphasis added.) No further reference to this alleged flaw appears, tribute being paid, rather, to the "exceptionally high spirit and discipline" displayed by the aforesaid ship's company during their final battle.

Specific questions of this kind, which arise on a number of other occasions in *Old Friends, New Enemies* as they do in earlier works of Marder's, point to an all-embracing issue of a more fundamental kind. Can there be, in fact, such a thing as "narrative history" which is independent of all "theories"? On what basis and by what criteria, implicit if not explicit, is this item of narrative included and that one left aside? When Marder himself, entirely legitimately, offers a statement concerning the origins of the Far Eastern war, do not certain theories lie behind his assertion that those origins can be

traced back to the crisis of 1931, rather than, say, to the development of certain attitudes towards the West in post-Tokugawa Japan, or to the creation of the prevailing international economic order? Did not a theory influence his decision to include in this present volume "a liberal infusion of the personal, the human, component"?

Another student of maritime affairs, Fernand Braudel, author of the majestic study *The Mediterranean and the World in the Age of Philip II*, has rightly observed that "narrative history is not an objective method, still less the supreme objective method, but is itself a philosophy of history". Perhaps it is in part because Professor Marder appears to have thought otherwise that, of the two books here reviewed, it is the less ambitiously conceived work by the relatively unknown Dr Neidpath that is the more satisfactory in its unobtrusive professionalism.

demise as a creative economic force.

The move to London, gradual, confused, defensive, and always mainly financial, was chiefly the work of the chairman, Laurence Scott, who emerges as an ideal proprietor who never interfered but thought deeply on long-term policy, as editors are not free to do. The *MG*, he thought, no doubt rightly, had to go national or go under. It was, as is, a question of advertising revenue per inch per thousand readers, or one may rub the point home, the more so since in the 1960s the cover price produced under a third of the revenue. The slump of 1966-67 nearly brought catastrophe, with the chairman of the *MG* wishing to merge it with Sir William Haley's *Times*, perhaps under Jo Grimond's editorship. Hetherington fought off what would have been essentially an absorption of the *MG*, doing so partly on the grounds of political principle, and partly because Haley generated a certain charm. Haley, drama, however, it certainly was, though recovery came quickly enough for the *MG* to overtake *The Times* in circulation in 1971.

The *MG*, of course, is a "kepi" paper much like any other. It made tiny profits until 1961. In every year since then, it has lost rather large sums, the deficit being made up by the prosperous *Manchester Evening News*. The move to London has brought circulation, not profit. Hetherington, an excellent press historian, if rather a wooden writer on recent political history, shows some of the difficulties. The "Women's Guardian", though good for advertising and sales, was abolished in 1973 as sexist, after pressure from women journalists. (Something

similar has returned as "Guardian Women".) The Middle East was equally sensitive. Marks and Spencer cancelling advertising after differing from the *MG* line on the Six-Day War. The paper excelled in recruiting the brilliant young - who now is old enough to remember that it was the *MG* which created Bernard Levin? Then, unhappily, in 1968 the NUJ refused to allow direct recruitment to Fleet Street. An editor has small enough room for manoeuvre. He may get good Welsh coverage here, or discover a Richard Baerlein to treat tacking with the seriousness it deserves; but this is painting with a small brush.

This, perhaps, is why Hetherington takes politics so seriously. The paranoid left have their fears of coups by retired generals; the paranoid right ought to be equally worried that the constitution as we know it is about to be overthrown by the machinations of politically motivated editors. Certainly a close inquiry into the aims, in terms of reconstruction of parties, of the editors of the *MG* and *The Times* over the last generation would go far to refute simple ideas of a Tory press. In all this talk of centre parties, there is a strong suspicion that the editors have been the fly on the wheel of the coach, believing it makes the wheels go round. Nevertheless, Hetherington certainly tells his tale as if he were a personage in high politics.

He has best cause for thinking so over Suez, when the *MG* taught a bemused Labour Party its lines. (The Queen's views on Suez, when people were "clawing" at each other in the Palace, may be found on page 49.) He was active in stirring the nuclear pot, promoted Cullaghan for Labour

leader in 1963, and tried to wave on the abortive Grimond-Wilson talks of 1965. His book gives useful information on what the paper was trying to do in each election; requiring reading for the specialist, if buried in overmuch recapitulation of the familiar. It is a Lib/Lab world, in which there is little personal knowledge of Tory leaders (and not too much of civil servants, businessmen, or trade unionists.)

Hetherington, if individually unexciting, was a good manager of an institution at a difficult time. He clearly thought that the maintenance of a political position should take first place over other concerns. Whether he achieved anything on these lines may be doubted. Certainly too serious and disciplined to be an exponent of radical chic, he perhaps stood for a tradition essentially opposed to many of the directions in which his paper was going. A lonely eminence, he appears to have reflected little on the great social forces which were transforming his paper: the creation of an opulent radicalism dependent on high public expenditure, the growth of the authority of the intelligentsia in national life. "Today," the *Guardian* recently wrote, "it's not enough to add a room or car port to the house, and swimming pool, heated, treated, and preferably covered, will add considerable value." All very well, but a long way from the bleak instructions issued to cub reporters in 1961, "our lowest priority in news is in the field of murder, sex and scandal"; and even further from the spirit of the septuagenarian C. P. Scott bicycling into the office through the Didsbury dusk. Hetherington created a thriving new London daily, and presided over the demise of a great tradition.

Mindlessly meditating

By Rosemary Dinnage

B. F. SKINNER:

Notes

366pp. Prentice-Hall. £11.95. 0 13 634106 9

A psychologist who writes literally as if he were a novelist, B. F. Skinner, keeps a notebook of jottings that aspire to the condition of epigrams comes into the dog-on-its hind-legs category (or kangaroo with a fountain-pen, in Wyndham Lewis's words). That B. F. Skinner, king of the behaviouristic school of psychology, should keep such a journal may surprise people, even if they also know him as author of the novel about a behaviouristically-shaped future, *Walden Two*; but in fact his first ambition, as related in his autobiography, was to be a writer. He spent a year after college trying, and failing, to make the grade as a literary man, and presumably he wrote about hopes, fears, wishes, ideas, and all the other "mentalist" variables he has since discarded. When - inspired by Bertrand Russell's account of J. B. Watson - he turned to psychology and became the most celebrated exponent of a philosophy that denies their relevance, he took his revenge on the unwieldy things.

Skinner has remained the most celebrated of the behaviourists, while Guthrie, Tolman, Hull - giants in their day - are forgotten. Partly it must be because of the streak of humor in him which has enabled him to write for non-psychologists and extend the whole notion of Pavlovian conditioning from the rat-cage to the social life; perhaps it owes something to his original notoriety as inventor of the "Skinner box" - an air-conditioned, sound-proofed glass cage - in which he brought up his second child for a year (it is said that Mrs Skinner popped the baby out as soon as he was safely off to work). The box was even marketed, as the "Leir Conditioner"; but it never caught on.

Conditioning has caught on, though, and for nearly half a century (assuming it to be on the wane) has been the centre and focus of academic psychology wherever the subject was taught. The "laws" of reinforcement (ie, reward) have been researched with an elaboration that makes medieval theology look down-to-earth. The behaviourist, of course, considers himself the very opposite

of the theologian, because he studies only behaviour, only what can be observed and recorded; but the number of angels that can stand on the head of a pin is really more interesting than the number of times a pigeon will press a lever to get a food pellet, or than Skinner's "Laws of Behaviour". (Example: "The Law of Prepotency. When two reflexes overlap topographically and the responses are incompatible, one response may occur to the exclusion of the other.")

It is hard for people in other disciplines, concerned with the intellectual movements of history, the personal details of biography, or the imaginary events of the novel, to conceive of a ruling school of study which dismisses all these as "supposed nonphysical events", not available to scientific study and therefore irrelevant to human psychology until such time as they can be analysed physiologically. William James in 1890, in his *Principles of Psychology*, was still able to write equally well on "The Stream of Consciousness" and "The Self" as on "The Functions of the Brain" and "The Muscular Sense" (though he privately complained that he found the latter infinitely boring). But, given the insoluble body - mind problem that has always dogged psychology, the extremist solution of behaviourism

presumably had to be tried out soon, or later. It has been tried out for a long time, and come up with practically nothing of interest to the human race. And meanwhile a subtle caste system has come into operation: as the pure mathematician or physicist feels superior to his colleague in applied science, the white-coated psychologist who believes he is working on a level unconnected with the messy and the personal looks down on his colleagues in education or psychotherapy or penology. There seems to be something almost Platonic in this aspiration to abstraction and mathematics.

So how does a writer who has discarded "ideas" fill his journal? First, of course, as behaviourists must, Skinner cheats linguistically. In *About Behaviour* he excuses himself for using "mentalist" phrases by the fact that the English language is "heavy-laden with mentalism... I see no reason to avoid such an expression as 'I have chosen to discuss...' (though I question the possibility of free choice), or 'I have in mind...' (though I question the existence of a mind)'. So here we

find him, reluctantly, "thinking", "wondering", and "recalling" quite a lot of the time.

But, are two often, he pulls himself together and translates his behavioural language. "How little thinking one does on a cruise" is rapidly followed by "Fresh stimuli take over, wholly prepotent over the self-stimulation of reflective behaviour". "When we say that a musical theme 'frustrates our expectations', he asks, 'can we describe the fact in another way?' Alas, yes, in twelve lines. These more successful as writers than Skinner hit the dust spectacularly. Stendhal's 'Je l'aime depuis que je le considère comme fouable' is rendered 'She remembered only what have been sexually reinforcing and I therefore react to her as I react to them'. An entry headed 'Tea and Madeleine's' is a rather uninteresting description of a bathroom experience involving toilet, soap, and oil of cloves. "Winterbourne had lost his instinct in this matter, and his reason could not help him" becomes "His behaviour had not for some time been contingency-shaped, and he was also unable to analyze the contingencies". (I believe that covers the case.) Skinner adds, as well as much easier to put it as James does. And here is the nub of the matter:

I love poetry and am moved by it, but it is basically a kind of fraud. It is truth for the moment, to match or support a feeling, and like music is justified accordingly. I do not want to destroy it. But it must not be taken seriously. Or permitted to interfere in serious matters.

No, Skinner is not teasing. He is quite serious and quite literal. At the best, behaviourism allows him to exercise a little irony, as when he comments on colleagues' academic idiosyncrasies (quite as bright as those of pigeons, or some common sense, as when he suggests improving the dustman's job by supplying a smart uniform. He is not an unkind man; he has always insisted that when society is behaviouristically shaped it will be in the most benign way (rewards, not punishments), and he includes a speculation on replacing the unfairness of children's snowball-throwing by snowballing groups, to cooperate on specially designed targets. But it wouldn't work, and it is as dangerous to be blind to the reality of cruelty as of poetry.

There is a certain fascination in

seeing how well he can stave within his chosen limits without wobbling, like watching a man in a slow bicycle race. On the one hand he undermines about his answer to a student's question - "What is love?" "Mutual reinforcement" - and decides that it is all right. On the other hand, there is an entry about sunlight diffracted through an icicle which "a poet or a metaphorical prose-writer" could make a lot of; as the icicle bends the rays so that it glitters and avoids melting, so "we are alive only to the extent that we affect others. We are dead as soon as we live for ourselves." It is just in the area of the "metaphorical prose-writer", the as-if area, that Skinner shows up behaviourism most painfully. On the simplest level of action, for instance, he is puzzled by the fact that when held up in a taxi in a traffic jam he makes urging movements even though they cannot speed the car up. At the other extreme, he writes of music which he enjoys and even calls "sublime" that

It is said that both Bach and Wagner "could penetrate to the essence of a poetic idea and translate it into musical terms".

But what did they really do? 1. They read a poem that appealed to them. 2. They wrote music to which it might be sung. They were successful if the music had the same effect on the listener as the poem. The effect was not an essence, and it was not translated.

How can he square this with his observation that his non-German-speaking daughter knew what had happened in an opera from the actual change in the music?

Just occasionally, we see Skinner wobbling quite dangerously. I won't listen to music he gets "a sense of self". But why do I not simply sit in silence? He answers in another entry:

What does one do when there is nothing to do?

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Symptoms of crumbling-down

By Thomas Sutcliffe

ROBERT STONE:

A Flag for Sunrise

414pp. Secker and Warburg. £6.95.
0 436 49681 X

In 1841 Carlyle opened his series of lectures *On Heroes and Hero Worship* by speaking of the "common languid times, with their unbelief, distress, perplexity, with their languid doubting characters and embarrassed circumstances, impossibly crumbling-down into ever worse distress toward final ruin". Robert Stone's novels have no heroes, but they are about similar times; he has earned himself a reputation in America particularly as a beat-generation Carlyle, a cultural conscience working through fiction. In his earlier novels *A Hall of Mirrors* and *Dog Soldiers* he pressed insistently on the bruises of America's mercenary and native politics and the corrupting inheritance of Vietnam, and his work was praised by critics and the distributors of literary prizes more for its rigorous moral precision, the way in which it laid out shame and guilt without mitigation, than for its craft or style. Now, in *A Flag for Sunrise*, he has turned his hand to prophecy (an acceptance, perhaps, of the role assigned to him) and at the same time turned to consider the introspection of liberal America. The book is pervaded by a sense of the moral *café* which afflicts those who live in countries with the time and money to develop carefully argued moral strategies and then find themselves combat-trained, without wars to fight. The result is a disturbing and disappointing book which suffers in all senses from a lack of resolution.

A Flag for Sunrise is set in the imaginary Central Republic of Tecan, lying somewhere on the political map between El Salvador and Honduras, a blend of the actual and the potential. As I was reading its fictional account of the preparations for revolution and civil sabotage the news carried reports from El Salvador of the destruction of major bridges and the continued success of the guerrillas in that country. Stone clearly intends the book to be in part a warning that Tecan or its equivalent is America's next Vietnam, a suggestion aided by the direct comparisons made by one of his principal characters. The sense of a shabby economic dependence and of American support for a worthless regime is strong; promotional tee-shirts for American products seem to be standard wear, and the main attraction at Tecan's Palace of Culture, built no doubt by AID dollars, is midge wrestling. But Tecan, the novel feels, is almost uninhospitable, peopled only by Stone's priestly characters. Father Egan, a rumpled priest suspicious of God's indifference, or worse, his undeclared departure; Sister Justin Keeney, a fatigued nun who seeks purpose in revolution; Hollivell, an anthropologist whose past includes work for the "Compu" in Vietnam; and Pablo Tibor, an amphetamine-nunching deserter with a paranoid which is justified by every turn of his short and brutal life. As Tecan and its rulers, betrayed by CIA "intelligence", head towards revolution Stone elaborates variations on a theme of fear and loathing which finally meet in the deliberate anti-climax of the novel.

Equally persistent is the theme of confession. The novel's opening promises an exploration of the truth contained in La Rochefoucauld's maxim: "We confess to our minor sins in order to prove to people that we have no major ones." But it ends

by illustrating the fatal circularity of placing faith in confession as a means of improvement and at the same time despairing of its effectiveness. Perhaps the reason for the enduring fascination of Vietnam for Stone is that it provided a "minor" sin, a ready guilt to explain the shame which in truth preceded it. In one of the most successful set pieces in the book Hollivell delivers a drunken lecture at the National University of Compostela which turns to maudlin cultural disgust, a critique with more echoes of Carlyle:

All civilized men - fascists and leftist intellectuals alike - recoiled and still recoil at Uncle Sam's bizarre creation, working masses with the money and the time to command the resources of their culture, who would not be instructed and who had no idea of their place . . . This debasement of police society is what we are now selling you.

Hollivell's indulgent self-abuse earns him both a rebuke from the more academic Compostelans who see in it moral decadence, ethical niceties inappropriate for their needs, and death threats from the more excitable students who interpret it as simple Marxism in masquerade. Stone reserves his own contempt for the complacency that such contempt implies, the ease with which Hollivell and others like him accept honesty about past crimes as a substitute for action. This perilous error of confusing the act of confession with absolution is shared, tellingly, by the brutal and psychopathic Guardia lieutenant Campos, who demands confession from Father Egan twice in the book, the second time after torturing and killing Sister Justin. In a bleakly funny scene Egan, vaguely conscious through the rum of his pastoral duties, instructs Campos that confession will not work unless he at least attempts to give up killing young

girls. The elements of True Confession and Resolve clearly remain a mystery. Campos is finally told that God does not care anyway and consequently that mercy does not exist. The implication for the ungodly seems to be that doctrines of worldly improvement are equally comfortable.

But despite the clarity and accuracy of this theme the novel leaves a feeling of failure and dissatisfaction, not only because the revolution, a repository for many hopes, itself fails, but because the anxieties of the characters are shared by the book. Stone's style in his earlier work was always highly coloured, but here it degenerates into boozy metaphysics and embarrassing mysticism. The rot starts with Hollivell's reference to "the whirling tidal pool of existence" but later references to "the great steaming jakes of the mind" and, on the next page "the wet cave of consciousness" can't be explained away as a successful imitation of drunken banality. When Hollivell and Justin make love they achieve orgasm as "a

process of ocean" whatever that is. The writing is, at times, so bad that "shameless" seems the appropriate word, as though Stone's sense of despair at self-judgment had extended to his writing.

The novel ends with Hollivell's acquiescence in violence and an end of his fear. "A man has nothing to fear, he thought to himself, who understands history." It is a deeply pessimistic final sentence, but it suggests perhaps that Stone still harbours hopes that history will not be repeated in El Salvador. Carlyle, who had as little time as Stone does for indecisive introspection, had even less for the impulse towards prophecy, and his warning at the beginning of *Signs of the Times* serves as an epitaph for the concerns of this unhappy novel. "It is no very good symptom of the times of nations or individuals that they deal much in vaticination. Happy men are full of the present for its bounty suffices them; and wise men also, for its duties engage them."

Confusion and misrule

By Frank Tuohy

BROWN MEGGS:

The War Train

A Novel of 1916

340pp. Hamish Hamilton. £7.95.
0 241 10393 2

Historical novels, which must deal with feelings rather than facts about the past, often get involved in questioning or revaluing popular myth and legend. *The War Train* is no exception: it is subtitled "a novel of 1916" - a legendary year for there ever was one, the Western Front and Easter in Dublin both being sources of a highly charged mixture of historic fact and mythology. The train in question, however, is not going in either of these directions. It is carried by US cavalry from Fort Meade, Dakota, towards the Mexican frontier. The purpose is a punitive expedition, led by General Pershing, against the Mexican rebel Pancho Villa, and the troops involved are veterans of another imperial pacification in the Philippines.

As the train makes its ill-organized progress towards the border, confusion and misrule take their toll. Without proper carriages, the horses die in large numbers and their bodies are dumped beside the railroad track. At Omaha a private carriage, containing the millionaire Otis Webster, his wife and pretty daughter, female companion, priest and servants, joins the train. They are to be spectators of the little war that is being planned. At one town the reception becomes riotous. Prostitutes are snuggled on board, a poker game ends in a violent death.

Laden with such exemplary symbolic freight, the train proceeds southward. The journey is seen from the point of view of young Cassius McGill, an ingenious Nebraska farmboy of catholic Irish background; as a Pullman employee, this is his first post of responsibility. In spite of his youth, Cassius has already earned a certain heroic status as pitcher for the Boston Browns, but his career has been ended by broken arm. This fact ensures that his misadventures will be looked on with tolerance by those in authority.

Brown Meggs - his name suggests a minor peak in the Lake District - has already written three other novels. "In 1976", we are informed, "he resigned his corporate posts in order to commit himself to a second career as a fiction writer." In common with other novelists today, his incomplete one to fiction appears to be an incomplete one. *The War Train*, then, is fiction based on fact: not only does he give the names of people and institutions which have helped him, but he also provides maps, a plan of Webster's luxurious carriage, a political cartoon showing Villa (who never appears in the story) being crushed by Uncle Sam's

boot. Historical figures appear in minor roles - George Patton as a junior officer, Damon Runyon as war correspondent - and there are extracts from contemporary newspaper reports. On the whole the narrative is sufficiently authentic without these aids. One would guess that their intention is to convince the casual reader that he or she is not wasting time but learning something.

Even without such help, the earlier chapters, full of technical details about the railroad, carry conviction. The novel forges ahead with something of the innocent enthusiasm of its young hero. Later, however, it becomes clear that the tension between fact and fiction is not easily to be resolved. Historical myth and historical reality can be disentangled and legends unlearned. In America there is an additional problem. Those of Mr Meggs's generation (old enough, that is, to have given up "corporate posts") will not just have learned the myths from tradition but will also have seen them in action, first in black and white and later in technicolor, in the Hollywood products of the 1930s and 1940s. A novel like *The War Train* fights a losing battle against the dominant images from the cinema.

There are some victories, of course. Hollywood never told us what all those frilly girls in the saloons, shepherded by some weak-cracking matron, were really up to. In this novel, the hookers, it can be said, really hook. Again, the hero's friend captured by Mexicans is mutilated in ways the old cinema public would hardly have tolerated. But in the matter of characterization the tradition seems inescapable: the drunken horse doctor is Thomas Mitchell, the benevolent millionaire is Charles Coburn in person; Slim Summerville, Harry Davenport take minor roles - a whole Hollywood generation is in the offing. These considerations dominate the excitement and melodrama of the conclusion. "Fiction based on fact" perhaps, but by then the facts are far behind.

Marginalia, by Edgar Allan Poe (235pp. University Press of Virginia. \$11.95. 0 8139 0812 4), reprints the first time all seventeen instalments as originally published in magazines between 1844 and 1849; typographical errors have been corrected. The publishers comment: "Everyone knows that Poe was a startling writer whose appeal was more to the nerves and emotions than to the intellect. Few are aware of his keen, analytic, wide-ranging mind, and few remember that Poe spent most of his life as a professional journalist. The *Marginalia* reveal facets of his personality many could never have suspected. . . . The subjects of the pieces range from plagiarism to English prosody, from copyright to collection. The tone is by turns mock-serious, dandified and erudite, displaying much 'questionable mastery of foreign languages'."

Managing the unmanageable

By Vicki Feaver

VAL WARNER (Editor):

Charlotte Mew

Collected Poems and Prose

445pp. Manchester: Carcanet. £9.95.
85635 260 8

A report of her death in a local newspaper described her as "Charlotte Mew, said to be a writer". Yet Charlotte Mew (1869-1928) was Virginia Woolf's opinion "the greatest living poetess". Siegfried Sassoon claimed her as "one of his spiritual benefactors". Writing to her friend Sir Sydney Cockerell, he predicted that "many will be on the rubbish heap when Charlotte's star is at the zenith where it will remain". Even Ezra Pound was an admirer, and both sent some of her poems (though unsuccessfully) to Harriet Monroe's *Poetry* and published "The Fête" in *The Egoist*. More than a decade later, writing with his usual candour to inform Harold Monro that his anthology *Twentieth Century Poetry* (1926) was "the usual dog damn sugar loaf of brish poetry", he conceded that it was "worth having for the Ger. Hopkins Leadon Echo and the Charlotte Mew".

In 1918 Mew received a letter from Hardy's second wife, Florence, expressing "the immense pleasure" given to Hardy by her collection *The Farmer's Bride* ("It now lies by him on his study table and I have read all the poems to him - some of them many times"), and inviting her to visit Max Gate. "Miss Mew", Hardy himself exclaimed to Vere Collins, indignantly at her exclusion from *J. C. Squire's Book of Women's Verse*, "is far away the best living woman poet - who will be remembered when others are forgotten." When Cockerell and Sassoon got up a petition to obtain a Civil List Pension for her, Hardy - along with Massfield and de la Mare - was one of the signatories.

Hardy was notoriously susceptible to literary ladies. However it seems likely that in Mew's case his admiration was genuinely that of one writer for another. Her poem "Fin de Fête", copied out in his hand, was found among his papers after his death. Mew thought of him as "her King of Wessex . . . continuing giant in a plumed age". But Hardy, though in his seventies, was not above learning from her. The final stanza of her poem "Woman much missed", for example, exploits rhythm to evoke extreme emotion in a way remarkably similar to the end of Mew's "The Farmer's Bride" (published in the *Nation*, in 1912). Hardy's "No-body comes", as Robert Gittings has noted, is clearly inspired by her poem "The Quiet House".

The Farmer's Bride was published in 1916 by Harold Monro, proprietor of the Poetry Bookshop. In 1921 he brought out an enlarged edition (published as *Saturday Market* in America) and in 1929, posthumously, by *The Rambling Sailor*. These volumes are now virtually unobtainable, as also is the 1953 edition of her *Collected Poems*, prefaced with a memoir of the poet by Alda Monro. Mew's stories and essays appeared in isolated magazines. Some (including a play broadcast by the BBC in 1953) were never published. *Charlotte Mew: Collected Poems and Prose* not only makes her poetry available once more but provides an opportunity for an assessment of her prose.

Val Warner's introduction combines a summary of the themes in Mew's work with a brief biographical sketch. As she points out, the poet's reluctance to disclose details of her private life has led to various speculations about her sexuality. T. E. M. Bull, for example, caused a mild flutter in the pages of the *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* by quoting a letter which related an anecdote attributed to May Sinclair of how "a lesbian poetess called Charlotte M." had chased her upstairs into a bedroom. But what Val Warner calls "the mystery of Charlotte Mew" is perhaps no mystery at all. Like her contemporary, the painter Gwen John, whom in many ways

she so closely resembles, she probably entertained passionate feelings for both men and women.

Florence Hardy described Mew as "a pathetic creature". Edith Sitwell as "a grey tragic woman", and Louis Untermeyer describes the "dark and gloomy house . . . the top of it rented so that they could pay for the little food needed to keep them alive" where "Charlotte, a younger sister Anne, and their helpless mother lived". But though the family certainly lived in reduced circumstances after her father's death, Mew's poverty was, Val Warner points out, a myth. She left a personal estate valued at £8,608. The spectre that haunted her was not starvation but fear of mental breakdown. Her brother and sister were committed to asylums. Charlotte and Anne decided early in life, according to Mrs Monro, that "they would never marry for fear of passing on the mental taint that was in their heredity".

Despite her liveliness and wit, Mew struggled continually with depression and after her sister's death from cancer she finally lost her precarious mental balance. Tortured by the idea that "as she had not had a vein opened in Anne's wrist her sister might have been buried alive", she killed herself by swallowing a bottle of Lysol.

Unsurprisingly this preoccupation with mental illness surfaces in her work. In the ironic, deceptively naive lyric "On the Asylum Road", for example, she seems to be suggesting that the inhabitants of "the house whose windows - every pane - are made of darkly stained or clouded glass" carry the burden of sin for the whole community. A longer narrative poem, "Ken", presents a moving and vivid portrait of a homeless half-wit, at first tolerated by the inhabitants of the God-fearing town in which he lives but finally, because by his strange behaviour in church he mocks their beliefs, led away to "the red brick barn on the hill". Like Crabbe's Peter Grimes, he is given a visionary stature. By employing a narrator who, like Crabbe's, is both a witness and involved in the events, and who, though sympathetic, shares the beliefs and prejudices of her pious community, Mew subtly questions conventional attitudes to the mentally ill.

Several of the characters in the stories, too, shows signs of mental disturbance. In "Spine", Mew employs a stream-of-consciousness technique to convey the failed-painter protagonist's feeling of unreality:

There was nothing there. Not the wallpaper, not the stove; not really there; not solid, only like things that aren't; like tree-shadows, the ghosts of leaves. The sheets too - he remembered some in Brittany, at Douarnenez; he had sat up all night, what did it matter? If you slept; if you could only sleep. . . .

Fear of madness obsesses the narrator of her first published story, "Passed", a blend of romanticized squalor, gothic flesh and soul-searching. The style is stilted and over-blown, but there is considerable interest in Mew's attempt to explore the mind of her narrator: her response to death, to human suffering, to mental abnormality (there's a scene with an "idiot girl") and to her own potential insanity. Henry Harland (who published the story in *The Yellow Book* of 1894), gave her some sound advice about its revision:

I look down your page and I cannot help feeling that you would lose nothing, but rather gain much by the substitution of less violent phrases . . . I mean, one gains so much in climactic moments by restraint and reserve; one loses so much by making one's language superlative.

Mew toned down the offending passages, but the comment remains a valid criticism not only of "Passed" but of her prose style in general.

Encouraged by the acceptance of "Passed", she submitted another story to Harland, "The China Bowl".

His response - to tell her that "there is no living writer of English fiction who can touch you" - seems in retrospect absurdly exaggerated: yet, despite the occasionally bathetic effect produced by the combination of Cornish dialect and poetic utterance, the story is probably her best.

The plot is simple: a tug-of-war between a mother and daughter-in-law that results in the death of the man they both love. The two women - the mother with her possessive love for her son, the wife whose jealous passion for her husband is "primitive, startling and half-savage like herself" - are painted larger than life. It is easy to see why Mew decided to adapt it as a play. The main weakness of both versions is the handling of the fourth character, a frivolous woman artist, introduced to precipitate the tragedy, to provide humorous relief and to contrast the superficial values of the smart artistic world with those of the simple fisher-folk, she is utterly unconvincing, and the result, especially in the play, where she remains on stage to the end, is to drain away the dramatic tension.

The tale is a morality about the destructive power of love, but is founded, to borrow George Eliot's phrase, on "a sympathy with that which of all things is most certainly known to us, the difficulty of the human lot". Among Mew's papers, Val Warner reveals, was an impressive list of quotations from the novelist's work. Her influence is apparent not so much in Mew's method of writing - which is more concerned with recording Paterian moments of heightened perception than with the development of character - as in her thinking. "I feel quite wicked with roses," I want to snarl them till there is no scent left," says Evelyn in "The Bridgegroom's Friend", quoting Maggie Tulliver's fateful admission to Stephen Guest. The themes of *The Mill on the Floss* - the contest between sensual indulgence and asceticism - are addressed to the poetic imagination, to death, or to "the earth" - her passionate and only love. The dramatic lyric "Remembrance" (to which and not, as Val Warner rather misleadingly implies, to her entire output) Mew applied the phrase "the love song of a woman who never loved", was an exception. Mew's poetry, on the other hand, concerned with actuality and the passions of flesh and blood, depends on her use of realistic detail - the clay that sticks to the gravedigger's spade in "Nunhead Cemetery", for example, or the putting up of a blind in "The Narrow Door".

"Not for that City", a sonnet-pub-

renunciation, and the peace and resolution of death - are those of Mew's work also.

An essay on Emily Brontë and a review of Richard Jefferies's *Field and Hedgerow* provide further insights. As is revealed by her poems "Domus Cnedit Arborem" and "The Trees are Down", together with a delightfully quixotic essay "Men and Trees", Mew shared Jefferies's conviction that "the earth is right and the tree is right; trim either, and all is wrong". Though lamenting his paganism - she herself seems to have been able to reconcile nature worship with vaguely Christian beliefs - she too thought of trees as embodying those spiritual values that the civilized world either has no time for or is actively out to destroy.

Again, her fascination with Emily Brontë is apparent in her story "Elfinor". But as poets they are very different, though both are distinguished by a refusal to resort to the common female expedient of amiability. Emily Brontë, as Mew observes in her perceptive essay, "had the power of presenting images and impressions of a convincing reality with a neglect or disdain of detail". Her genius was "purely spiritual, strangely and exquisitely severed from embodiment and freed from any accident of sex"; her poems are addressed to the poetic imagination, to death, or to "the earth" - her passionate and only love. The dramatic lyric "Remembrance" (to which and not, as Val Warner rather misleadingly implies, to her entire output) Mew applied the phrase "the love song of a woman who never loved", was an exception. Mew's poetry, on the other hand, concerned with actuality and the passions of flesh and blood, depends on her use of realistic detail - the clay that sticks to the gravedigger's spade in "Nunhead Cemetery", for example, or the putting up of a blind in "The Narrow Door".

"Miss Mew: too much emotion for her art, for her intellect, for her will . . . the violence of over-wrought nerves does much to harm her power of expression", complained T. E. Lawrence. But while this is true of some of her poetry, in others, where she deliberately set out to expose "the violence of over-wrought nerves", she is completely in control. "The Quiet House" is a good example (though according to Mew herself, "the most subjective of the lot").

The poem's objectivity is achieved partly by altering biographical details, but mostly by the skilful handling of the narrative structure:

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emotionally turbulent, at times almost hallucinatory passages are balanced by stretches of flat, though highly suggestive description. The poem is a superb short story, from its anecdotal, deceptively casual opening —

When we were children old Nurse used to say
The house was like an auction or a fair
Until the lot of us were safe in bed.
It has been quiet as the country-side
Since Ted and Nancy and then Mother died
And Tom crossed Father and was sent away.

To the subdued but devastating end
To-night I heard a bell again —
Outside it was the same mist of fine rain,
The lamps just lighted down the long, dim street.

No one for me —
I think it is myself I go to meet:
I do not care; some day I shall not think
I shall not be!

In a letter of 1913 Mew mentioned "things now in my head rather unmanageable and possibly too big to pull off as in this form I am really a beginner". She was almost certainly referring to the most ambitious of all her poems, "Madeleine in Church". She had already used the Madeleine story in an early poem "She was a Sinner", as well as in "No More Tango", a dream-like, pastoral version of the theme. It may have been the discovery of the rather brittle and unsuitable contemporary voice in this poem that gave Mew the idea for her modern Madeleine. To locate her in the city she had personified, in her poem "Le Sacre-Coeur", as a prostitute ("Dear Paris of the hot white hands / Une jolie fille à vendre, très chère...") must have seemed obvious.

By placing Madeleine in a darkened church in front of a plaster saint, Mew deals ingeniously with the technical problem of interior monologue — how to provide the initial impetus for a stream of reminiscence and reflection. The poem is not, however, a meditation on saintliness — "If it is Your will that we should be content with the tame, bloodless things / As pale as angels, smirking by, with folded wings / Oh! I know Virtue, and the peace it brings!" Madeleine exclaims scornfully at one point — but a revelation

of human vulnerability, of tears about ageing and death.

Madeleine would desperately like to believe. But she can neither envisage a "Paradise beyond this world", nor accept the platitudes of orthodox religion. Her account of her lovers and ex-husbands — Monty "gone suddenly blank and old / The hateful day of the divorce" and Stuart who "got his hands down, of course / Crowing like twenty cocks and grinning like a horse" — unfolds with the raciness of the Wife of Bath's Tale. In the verse, rhyme and metre are subordinate to the intimate and colloquial flow of the human voice (Mew insisted that her printers should preserve the long lines).

Much of the poem's impact is achieved by the way in which Mew subverts traditional religious imagery. "Underneath his wing / I shall lie safe and freed from care", affirms Christina Rossetti, in her poem "Death is Swallowed up in Victory". But Madeleine cries, "Then safe, safe are we? In the shelter of this everlasting wings — / I do not envy Him his victories. His arms are full of broken things", employing the same image to create an appalling vision of the cost such a victory might entail. In this poem as elsewhere she brought to poetry particular techniques — arresting openings, the oblique revelation of plot, the use of carefully edited speech — which she had practised in her short stories. Like Edward Thomas, whose prose also suffered from his tendency to over-poetize, she discovered in poetry the virtues of restraint and compression.

The *Collected Poems and Prose*, though fascinating throughout (especially perhaps for the glimpses into her childhood given by "Miss Boleyn" and "An Old Servant"), shows that Mew was right to devote her energies, at her most creative period, entirely to writing poetry. Much of her prose now seems rather precious; the work of a talented beginner. Her best poetry, however, is memorable, moving, though oddly unclassifiable. It is no wonder that Eddie Marsh found her too idiosyncratic for the "comfortable charabanc" of the Georgians. She was, as Virginia Woolf recognized, "unlike anyone else".

population of five million allows scope for plenty of this recollections of war form a major literary topic, and the Finnish blend of courage, stubbornness and grim humour is well represented.

The writers are twelve men and two women, ranging in age from the mid-fifties to twenty-five. They are poets, novelists, dramatists, psychiatrists, scholars, critics, editors and publishers. All are excellent. Poetry predominates, but five short stories provide a valuable contrast. The tone varies from Paavo Haavikko's tough cynicism through the touching story of loneliness by Martti Jounpövi, "Real Hair", and Kirsti Kunnas's amusing but penetrating children's verse, to the harsh but humorous touched study of a killer, "The Engineer's Story", by Antti Tuuri. Eeva-Liisa Manner is a versatile poet; she writes of public issues from the stance of a disquieted visionary, describing the sufferings in a modern Hades. But she has a heartening sense of humour and has translated Eliot's cat poems. Herbert Lomas has re-adapted two of her adaptations, and the first line of "Jack the Growliger's Last Stand" — "Eliot's 'Growliger's Last Stand' — has been a 'Jack was a yobbo who lived in an alley', a brisk variant of the original 'Growliger was a Bravo Cat, who travelled on a barge'".

Herbert Lomas's versions are brilliant re-creations. Indeed, his style — as in his own poetry, direct and economical — is so masterly that it has a unifying effect on that of all fourteen writers. But comparison with earlier translations by other hands of, for instance, Haavikko and Sankari, shows just how good Herbert Lomas's are — light, leaping and right on the mark. The introduction and biographical notes on the writers complete this enjoyable book.



This lithograph by Pierre Bonnard, entitled "Dimanche Matin", is one of a series of illustrations the artist made in 1893 for an album of music, *Petites Scènes Familiales* by Claude Terrasse. It is reproduced from Bonnard — the Complete Graphic Work by the late Francis Bouvet (351pp, Thames and Hudson, £35, 0 500 09148 X). This is the first complete catalogue raisonné and includes an introduction by Antoine Terrasse, and 536 illustrations.

Chock full o' nuts

By E. S. Turner

CATHERINE CAUFIELD:
The Emperor of the United States of America and Other Magnificent British Eccentrics
223pp. Routledge and Kegan Paul.
£6.95.
0 7100 9957 7

It is prudent in an author who writes about eccentrics to disarm the reviewer by saying that the choice of characters is itself eccentric. How odd must one be to qualify for this label? Is it necessarily eccentric to advocate, like Colonel George Hanger, a tax on Scotsmen who spend more than six months in England? Is literary incapacity, indulged in the face of ridicule, as by McDonagall and Amanda Ros, a mark of eccentricity? Is it eccentric to be able, like William Buckland, to dip one's fingers into the "blood" seeping from a statue, lick them, and say, "I can tell you what it is; it is bat's urine". Does a single recorded act of eccentricity like leaving a fortune to a cat or to Jesus Christ, qualify one for a niche in this pantheon?

Catherine Caufield, who read sociology and anthropology at an American college, says that other writers in this field — a well-dug one by now — have included witches, freaks, criminals, madmen and rogues. She has chosen "the pure eccentric, which is what might be defined as what is left when the types mentioned above have been filtered out". Eccentrics, in her view, must be funny. Her publishers call her book "dazzlingly funny" and so it is, in parts; but there are moments when, confronted by all those unwhimsical misers and corpse-fanciers, one feels like a visitor dragged along to laugh at the population of Bedlam.

The eccentric who gives the book its title is a case in point. This self-styled Emperor of the United States was London-born Joshua Norton, who went bankrupt in 1856 after failing to corner the rice market. He deposed himself, first, Emperor of California and then of the Union, and began acting out appropriate fantasies, like summoning Lincoln and Jefferson (unsuccessfully) to his presence in an attempt to call off the Civil War. His imperial palace was a room in a seedy lodging-house, the room of which was paid by his "royal subjects". The people of San Francisco "always rose to their feet" when he entered a theatre, showing themselves to be little less eccentric than the Emperor. Robert Louis Stevenson apparently praised them for humoring a "harmless madman". Would the people of London

have played along in the same way? Emperor Norton may have been no different from the many Napoleons in the madhouse, or he may simply have been a humbug who knew how to exploit a joke. On the evidence here, we cannot say.

Many old favourites strut these pages: Squire Mytton, who set fire to his nightdress to cure his hiccups (a man, according to Edith Sitwell, "chased always by a high mad black wind"); William Beckford, the perverse jerry-builder of Fonthill; "Romeo" Coates, the diamond-upholstered Antiguan widely lauded for his incompetence as an actor; the Earl of Bridgewater, who had his servants attend his dogs at table; the Duchess of Queensberry, who used to seize a broom and start sweeping in order to speed the departure of guests; and the Scots judge Lord Monboddo, who thought infants were born with tails which the midwives snipped off.

There is a good range of newcomers, some of them lightweights, others doughty contenders. A welcome, then, to the twelfth Duke of St Albans, who was so uncertain of the number and identity of his bastards as to be heard muttering to a friend at lunch, "What do you think? Is he one of mine?" And a round of applause for William Strachey, a former Indian civil servant, who so greatly admired Calcutta time — nearly six hours different from despatch Greenwich Mean — that he lived by it in Britain. A Strachey family doctor is quoted as saying that none of the family would ever go mad — they were much too eccentric for that.

A curious feature of the book is the number of recurring obsessions. The "bad" Earl of Lonsdale and the capricious Van Butchell, dentist and truss-maker, both embalmed their wives and kept them in glass-topped cases in the house (Van Butchell's wife had two "nicely matched glass eyes"). Brian Maguire, "a solon of the ancient and once-powerful house of Fermanagh", embalmed his twelve-year-old son and kept him in a glass case. Hannah Beswick, of Manchester, afraid of being buried alive, was preserved by her doctor, who kept her in a glass-fronted grandfather-clock case, with a velvet curtain, in his own house; on each anniversary of her death he visited her, accompanied by a witness.

Among those who liked to try out their coffins, both for size and comfort, were the tenth Duke of Hamilton (when he died they broke off his feet to fit him into his Egyptian sarcophagus) and Lady Cardigan, who was assisted at rehearsal by her butler. The chief concern of Margaret Thompson, who lived in Westminster, was that her coffin should be covered with her favourite Scots snuff. At her funeral fistfuls of

it were tossed to the mourners.

Some of the oddities practised were more widespread, perhaps, than the author thinks. A liking for the company of cows was inspired by a popular belief that bovine breath was therapeutic; people even went to cowsheds for "the cure". Sir Tatton Sykes was not alone in denying his tenants the right to have front doors: the eleventh Duke of Bedford forbade this luxury too, holding that it only encouraged women to gossip.

Sir Tatton's other habit of striking off the heads of his tenants' flowers with a cane ("Grow calliflowers!") was also shared by a duke, the canal-building Duke of Bridgewater, who vandalized all blossoms with a stick if his gardeners grew them at Worsley Old Hall.

Why, one wonders, was the excellent John Britton (d. 1714) included? He was the "musical coalman" who held crowded concerts for London's fashionable and discerning, and whose eye for rare books impressed distinguished bibliophiles. The author concedes that Britton, who never ceased to deliver coals, was a plain, cheerful, honest man, as many of his contemporaries testified. Perhaps his only eccentricity was to drop dead after being frightened by a ventriloquist. Again, was Lt-Col A. D. Wintle, of recent memory, an eccentric in any true sense? Or was he a blunt, forthright soldier with high standards he was not afraid to maintain, even if it meant bagging a solicitor in a good cause?

Only ten of the inmates of this book are women. This, we are told, is because women are trained to submerge themselves in husband and family and "small acts of female eccentricity are subsumed in the greater eccentricity of simply being female in a masculine world". So one of the first-fruits of the feminist wave should be a rich crop of female eccentrics.

Catherine Caufield does not bother the reader with notes. If she says Sir George Sitwell hired 4,000 men to dig a lake we must take it as made up. Luckily those years spent reading sociology in America have not corrupted her prose. She writes dead-pan and lets the lives speak for themselves. On the debit side, several proper names are misspelled and there is a reference to "the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Rev. Fisher". Wyndham Lewis seems fated to be confused with D. B. Wyndham Lewis, the humorist.

Peter Till contributes some delightful full-page illustrations, but the wilfully eccentric page-fillers — little men lurking about with umbrellas and deck-chairs — grow a little wearisome. Trend-spotters may care to know that the book designer gets her well as the author and the jacket as

DONALD HALL (Editor):
The Oxford Book of American Literary Anecdotes
360pp. Oxford University Press. £8.95.
0 19 502938 0

In *Life* magazine during the war I seem to recall a feature about an aeroplane, possibly that beautiful object the P38 or Lockheed Lightning. Beside an example of the plane, on a large tract of paved ground, stood a massive assembly of people. At the front were the actual crew of the plane, one or two in number. Behind them, in an ever-broadening pyramid, and as far as the eye could reach, were all the other people required to get the thing into the air: the riggers and fitters, loaders and unloaders, armourers, window-cleaners, cooks, nurses, psychiatrists (Freudian, Jungian and eclectic), chaplains of all denominations, career advisers, recreational personnel, military tailors, bus drivers, bus repairers, career advisers and psychiatrists for the bus drivers and so on.

This is something of an image of American literature, perhaps because it is an image of American activities in general, showing, as they do, a kind of tropical luxuriance of co-operativeness, most evident as far as the matter in hand is concerned, in the acknowledgments that so often constitute a large and obstructive vestibule which has to be navigated before one can get at the actual text of an American academic book.

Donald Hall pays his respects to this side of American literature in admitting to his selection of American literary anecdotes a large number of people one is a little surprised to find there. To start with there are several members of the real ground-crew of American letters, conspicuously Maxwell Perkins, publisher's editor, and Harold Ross, the barely literate founding editor of the *New Yorker*. At least the anecdotes in which they figure usually involve writers as well.

That cannot be said of all or even most of the anecdotes about politicians and the book contains. The most notable of these politicians are Jefferson (to whom many pages are consecrated), the orator Daniel Webster, Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt. Donald Hall excuses the presence of Jefferson by referring to him, quite correctly of course, as "the author of the American Constitution". Apart from that he is not widely read. His *Notes on the State of Virginia* is described by another Oxford reference book as "an unpretentious patriotic compendium", in other words the sort of thing the Duke of Omnium might have tossed off during a wet weekend.

Of Lincoln Donald Hall says "his written words, nobly assembled, read most of the American consciousness". The same could be said of Oliver Cromwell and the British consciousness, thanks to Carlyle, but it does not make Cromwell a literary man and he is not to be found in the anecdote collection made by James Sutherland on which Donald Hall's book is modelled. Unfortunately Lincoln is the subject, or victim, of a doubly undesirable anecdote. It is meant to dig a lake we must take it as made up. In essentials: a man tries to shoot Lincoln and when asked why he has long intended to shoot anyone he meets who is uglier than he is, Lincoln says, "I shoot of the body from which he will reappear at least capture the attention. Paine comes across as unattractively nude. Foreman, like Hume, talks of his friends as having "fallen dead from the press". In general this ancient matter seems to have been quarried from a Victorian guide for after-dinner speakers. Theodore Parker's funeral discourse on Daniel Webster reads like one of the crueler bits of parody in *Martin Chuzzlewit*.

Whitman is the first real anecdotal star, combining importance, impulsiveness and eccentricity in the right proportions. He published a private letter from Emerson in a daily paper, to Emerson's consternation. "I should have enlarged the but", Emerson said when told about it. Whitman found Wilde "genuine, honest and manly", for more than one reason not unintelligibly. His greeting for a visitor was "Howdy".

Whittier, the shy Quaker poet, inveigled into a tea-party, says, "I know thee is going to have some kind of a fandango." Melville is mildly damned with faint praise by Hawthorne: "He is a person of very gentlemanly instincts in every respect, save that he is a little heterodox in the matter of clean linen" — and by a reviewer: "Had he possessed as much literary skill as wild imagination his works might have secured for him a permanent place in American literature." Mark Twain closes the second phase with a crisp example of the mutual civilities of authors. Asked if he knew Bret Harte he answered, "Yes, I know the son of a bitch." This is a modest anticipation of the odious ill-nature of Robert Frost.

Henry James is one of a group of whom Donald Hall says that "each could be the subject of a book of anecdotes". James, of course, is, namely Simon Newell-Smith's excellent *The Legend of the Master*. The odd thing is that one of the Jamesian anecdotes comes from that book. But the best of them, also in Sutherland, comes from Edith Wharton and deals, at unfortunately unquotable amplitude, with James's procedure as navigator on a car trip. An occasion giving dinner to Maupassant when he was called upon by the warm-blooded story-writer to get him a woman at a neighbouring table ironically prefigures stories of the same basic structure about Americans in Israel and other such starchy places. Edith Wharton, it should be said, responds very contentedly to the guiding pressure of Aldous Huxley's hand on her behind, a measure of accommodation one might not have expected.

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Punch-ups and punch-lines

By Anthony Quinton

not think he ever had to live by his pen as Churchill did. All the same, allowing for the rather large difference of scale between the two, writing bulked about as large in the life of one as of the other.

Moving on from politicians there are a couple of freed slaves, Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington, who simply have one interesting story to tell, like Douglas Bader or the late W. F. R. Macartney. There are also journalists, such as Horace Greeley, and hacks of the Mills and Boon variety, such as Horatio Alger. Of the latter it is interesting to learn that as a clergyman he had used the ardent lads of his Cadets for Temperance for purposes of buggery. The parish committee (including the agreeably named Elisha Bangs) taxed him with this and he did not deny the accusation, admitting that he had been imprudent. Donald Hall says that one hundred and twenty success stories later, much richer and living in New York, Alger "kept a close association with the Newsboys' Lodging House".

A similar arresting lapse brings to the fore a central aspect of the life of American writers for at least the last century. Harriet Beecher Stowe went to call on the wife of the editor Thomas Bailey Aldrich. The day was hot, Mrs Stowe polished off a lot of claret cup and after complaining that the room was stifling and full of blue mist, she more or less passed out.

That story suggests inexperience. From the appearance of Wallace Stevens half-way through the book, drunk on two occasions with Robert Frost, and on a third with Hemingway and Dos Passos, drunkenness in one form or another turns out to be the main anecdote-provoking thing about American writers, as, indeed, it seems to have been their main leisure activity. It absorbs the best energies of O'Neill, Sinclair Lewis, Robert Benchley, Edna Millay, Hemingway, Hammett, Fitzgerald, Faulkner, Hart Crane and so on. The widespread nature of this intense commitment to drink among writers is weird. Or is it just that everybody drinks a great deal in the United States and that writers, being more sensitive, show it much more than everyone else?

There is a clear distinction between three phases of American literary history in this book, and, I suspect, in reality. In the first stage, before the emergence of Washington Irving and Fenimore Cooper fairly early in the nineteenth century, there is not all that much going on, apart from sermons and edifying or political verse, and the anecdotes are very thin. But one would not expect too much from the Oxford Book of Tasmanian Literary Anecdotes, to take a place of comparable popularity, definable for American literature as Van Wyck Brooks's stamping-ground. Donald Hall sees it as ending with Mark Twain and Henry James. The line would be drawn best somewhere between them, just after Bret Harte, say, and before William Dean Howells.

The anecdotes of the first phase are very small beer and the people they might be enlightening about are almost wholly devoid of literary interest. Cotton Mather's reflections on how making water can encourage edifying thought about God's merciful sparing one from painful infection (if he hears) and the baseness of the body from which he will reappear at least capture the attention. Paine comes across as unattractively nude. Foreman, like Hume, talks of his friends as having "fallen dead from the press". In general this ancient matter seems to have been quarried from a Victorian guide for after-dinner speakers. Theodore Parker's funeral discourse on Daniel Webster reads like one of the crueler bits of parody in *Martin Chuzzlewit*.

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Against this background of gloom Auden shines out. His anecdotes are real anecdotes with a punch line. Even as part of the scenery he imparts a glow. Stravinsky observed of the crinkled face of his old age, "Soon we shall have to smooth him out to see who he is."

Like the scientists of the early Royal Society who proved for the mischievous Charles II a non-fact he had asked them to explain, one might be led into accounting for the behavioural extremity into which the anecdote seems to have declined by a press-fed appetite for sensation or again by the attenuated common life of writers in our age in the zoo-like surroundings of conference or "writer's colony". Auden shows that the explanation is not needed.

Nice and not so nice

By Peter Kemp

PHILIP GARDNER:
Kingsley Amis
174pp. Boston: Twayne.
0 8057 6809 2

Noticeably keen on niceness, Philip Gardner isn't perhaps the ideal guide to that world of virtuous grumpiness, Kingsley Amis's fiction. Throughout his book, he keeps worrying about the personalities of the protagonists, trying to manoeuvre them into as favourable a light as he can. The word "likeable", applied wherever possible, works overtime. "Vandervane of *Girl*, 20 just about passes muster as 'by no means wholly dislikeable'. But it has to be conceded of the baroque bundle of egotism and bigotry who is the central figure in *The Green Man* that "Allington's excessive drinking and his inability to relate well even to his family... prevent him from being an easily likeable character". Uneasy with

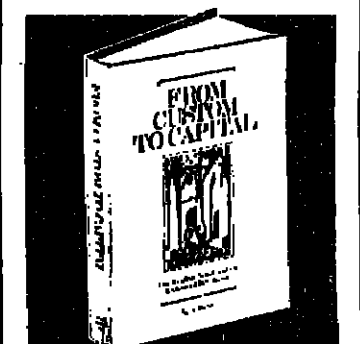
Amis's "bleakness and irritation", Gardner often seems engaged in the thankless task of arguing for the novels as repositories of warmth and compassion.

Never entirely comfortable, it seems, with the tone and tenor of the books, he can sometimes fail to pick up what is of significance in them. He declares, for instance, that the three passages read by the hero of *Jeke's Thing* in between bouts of visual stimulation in a sex clinic are "paragraphs of tangential satire... not apparently chosen for any light, ironic or otherwise, which they might cast on the story". In fact, they're quotations from Mill's *On Liberty*; and, as such, very relevant to the novel's examination of pseudo-emancipation and real freedom.

But, while Gardner's individual analyses of Amis's novels can be weak, he does supply a great deal of useful biographical material. He has rewardingly ragsacked Amis's interviews for helpful pointers. And he pays scrupulous and sometimes illuminating attention to Amis's Moviematist attitudes.

CORNELL University Press

The profound impact of the Industrial Revolution on life in England is universally recognized. Less obvious, however, are the connections between that revolution and the ideas, values, and attitudes of the people whom it affected. In *From Custom to Capital*, Igor Webb asserts that the linkage is close and important, not casual. He attempts to show that novels written during the years 1780-1850 reflect England's transition from an agrarian to an industrial nation: from custom to capital.



Marxist in his approach, Webb makes use of various techniques—close reading, original historical research, structuralist interpretation—to establish correspondences between key elements of social consciousness and the forms of fiction.

Among the novels he discusses at length are Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and *Mansfield Park*; Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley*; and Charles Dickens's *Hard Times*. He notes parallels between political economy and the novel, showing how the three authors' characterizations of personal growth coincided with changing views of economic value.

The result of Webb's fascinating inquiry is a new and provocative reading of important texts; a reassessment of the writings of Austen, Brontë, and Dickens; and an illuminating picture of life in a society undergoing epochal transformation.

From Custom to Capital is broad in scope; it will appeal to students of the novel and of English history, to those interested in the connections between literature and society, and to those concerned with the implications of a broadly Marxist literary theory.

"Valuable reading."
—Library Journal

FROM CUSTOM TO CAPITAL
The English Novel and the Industrial Revolution
By IGOR WEBB
At your bookstore or from
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New York 14850

commentary

The serial continues

By Richard Osborne

Muscle of Flight Decades
Royal Festival Hall / BBC Radio 3.

"Ohime! Wehl! Miserere!" moaned Stravinsky. "Old-style, modern-music festivals are doomed." And with them, he implied, the chance of unmasking the bogus and the second-rate. *Muscle of Flight Decades* is not, however, an old-style modern-music festival, though the eight concerts scheduled up to May 1982 inevitably include a crop of projected premieres. Artistically, it is something in the nature of a retrospective, albeit a tentative one; administratively, it is a welcome attempt by William Glock and Robert Ponsbury to knock some sense into the London orchestral scene on the matter of twentieth-century music.

There could have been few better works with which to launch the series than Stravinsky's *Agon*. Stravinsky's espousal of serialism marked the second significant divide in his career (the first being the turning from the Russian tradition to neo-classicism). In *The Language of Modern Music* Donald Mitchell suggested that the long history of serialism (*Agon* was begun in 1954) and the death of Schoenberg in 1947 opened the serial method, so to speak, to negotiation. Here was another tradition which could be safely appropriated. In its fascinated encounter with a past which includes not only the courtly bristles of the age of Louis XIII but also the Schoenbergian experiment, and in its relocation of the past in a fertile present (*Agon* is one of Stravinsky's most freshly inventive scores), it joins a line of earlier Stravinsky works of which *Apollon*, that serene masterpiece, comes most readily to mind.

Agon means contest, a contest between periods and styles and qualities of gesture. Significantly, Balanchine, for whom the score was written, required no "plot". The music's courtly element nonetheless presupposes a rather more intimate setting than the Royal Festival Hall. The discourse of flutes, mandolin and harp, and the superbly wrought string sonorities seemed oddly distant and dyspeptic at times. There was rhythmic awkwardness, too, suggesting more hiccups than actually exist. "Music rots when it gets too far from the dance", Pound said. Stravinsky's never does, but Rozhdenskyevsky seemed occasionally to be drawing it away.

Until Janacek's gloriously resilient *Sinfonietta* (commissioned for a symphony festival: more *agon*) with which the concert resplendently ended there was a preponderance of

colour at the expense of rhythm. Both Scriabin's *Prometheus* and Schmitt's *In Memoriam* are, if not rotten, then perceptibly ripe. Yet for all the sub-Lawrentian mysticism of Scriabin's programme (creation, the fire of fire, will, reason, and Man versus the Cosmos) the orchestral palette is dazzlingly used. What's more, the performance by the BBC Symphony Orchestra and the solo pianist, Victoria Postnikova, was at once sumptuous and keen-eyed, with a climax which put one in mind of Scriabin's ultimate megalomaniac fantasy: a work whose venue was to be the Himalayan foothills with Scriabin himself at the centre of an event which would include cloud-born bells and the gathering of the faithful from the four corners of the earth.

The series boasts three UK premieres and two world premieres (including on May 11 a new work by Maxwell Davies). New works inevitably raise problems of assimilation for both listeners and players; though, that said, the orchestra's playing of the Schmitt was remarkable, a tribute to Rozhdenskyevsky's care and communicative power. Perhaps because the forty-seven-year-old Russian-born composer is a self-confessed "polystylist", the problem of assimilation is less acute. In *Memorial*, dedicated to the composer's mother, was originally written as a Piano Quintet before being transcribed, at Rozhdenskyevsky's suggestion, for full orchestra. It was first heard in orchestral form in Moscow in 1979. As in Scriabin, images abound: tolling chords and sudden moments of stasis, richly scored. Throughout *In Memoriam* there's a good deal of tonic swarming, nightmarish extrusions which are resolved on organ and pastoral woodwinds in a kind of vaguely troubled *paradise*. It is an involving piece, but the glinting, recrudescence energy of the Janacek which followed pointed up a certain inertia in it, which even a wry Mahlerian waltz could not entirely ally.

The fiercely Slavonic performance of Janacek's 1926 *Sinfonietta* was indeed a highlight of the programme. The work's heady celebration of new-found Czech freedom survives in spite of the political reversals of subsequent years. Optimistic without being facile, it gives credibility to Tippett's assertion that "a culture never falls to pieces; it gives birth". After several decades of painful deliveries the Glock/Ponsbury series gives us a chance to sit back and contemplate a heritage which instinct tells us is far from spent.

The second concert in this series has just been held. The others are on January 15, March 3 and 22, April 21 and May 6 and 11.

Family viewing

By Celina Fox

The Art of Radio Times
Victoria and Albert Museum

It would be hard to think of any medium less intrinsically conducive to artistic inspiration than the *Radio Times*. Published on cheap newsprint, it was in the early years inevitably confined to information about sound broadcasting. Yet in its unobtrusive way the magazine contributed to the perpetuation of an art form which, as the competition from photographic half-tone grew, was becoming increasingly obsolete. *Radio Times* was the last refuge of black and white illustration, the final resting-place of a graphic tradition whose strength in this country is still underrated.

The Art of Radio Times, at the Victoria and Albert Museum until February 21, and a book of the same title compiled by David Driver (23 pp., BBC Publications, £15.95, 0 563 17066 6), commemorate sixty years of publication. The exhibition starts with a small display of modern stages involved in the process of reproduction, from a neatly typed official briefing document to the rough and finished artwork, and then the flog, stereo and printed page. But on the evidence of the artists who are interviewed in the book, the process has not always been so streamlined. Most received their briefs on Friday and were expected to produce the illustration by Monday, working under pressure over the weekend when the libraries which provided the main sources of background material were shut.

Nor were the results always fully appreciated. Eric Fraser was asked to remove a figure of Christ from a drawing, and when he illustrated articles by Maurice Lane Norcott by showing the side of a building with pieces of nude statuary set in the niches, "Back came the drawing with a request that I dress them in robes. I think of this whenever I see the Eric Gill sculptures on Broadcasting House". Leonard Rosoman's illustration for *Cakes and Ale* was not used at first because it showed Rosie deshabille, and "it was decided that it was a little forthright for what, after all, is a family magazine". The BBC certainly displayed a commendable zeal in commissioning quality work, but presumably the talents of Gill and Jones, Gooden and Buckland-Wright were considered too daring to be unleashed from the confines of the private presses.

The restrictions were, however, more than outweighed by the compensations, and copious expressions

of gratitude are extracted from the artists in the book. The exposure was enormous - at its peak in 1954, *Radio Times* sold nine million copies - and the payment surprisingly generous. Victor Reinganum considered that the pre-war fee of three guineas per illustration compared very favourably with present-day rates; he was able to support a wife and two children fairly comfortably on six guineas a week. There were few firms like Shell and London Transport prepared to employ avant-garde artists and *Radio Times* was the only popular magazine which patronized, in however limited a fashion, modern art.

Nevertheless, the character of *Radio Times* was not set by the masters of the modern movement like Nash, Nevinson and McKnight Kauff, who were occasionally employed for the covers, but by those artists who produced marvellous designs in the body of the paper, week after week. Both the book and the exhibition draw extensively on the work of Eric Fraser, who has contributed to the magazine since 1926 and whose brilliant facility for pattern-making was used to best advantage when he was called upon to portray contemporary phenomena and the slightly chilly image of twentieth-century man. Victor Reinganum moved on from drawing jaunty troops of art deco chorus girls to the Festival of Britain promised land anticipated in his cover design for "Radiolympia" of 1949. Bob Sherriffs could pinpoint

a radio personality with a few bold strokes.

But *Radio Times* also supported artists whose individual, immediately recognizable style was an extension of older traditions. The lyrical talent of Ardizzone is unmistakable in both bustling vignettes and jolly Christmas covers. Leonard Rosoman was adept at suggesting a delicate psychological interplay among the characters from radio drama, while Robin Jacques, extracting their essence, (Beneath the title of *Julius Caesar*, he placed a prone figure, shrouded except for a hand and a sandal with a rumpled toga.) Bert Thomas's figures were firmly of that English type, bred by Keene and perpetuated by Reynolds. W. H. Kermode owed an enormous debt to Félix Valloir, who were occasionally employed for the covers, but by those artists who produced marvellous designs in the body of the paper, week after week.

The advent of television reduced the role played by illustration. Of the artists used by the magazine to date, Peter Brookes expresses some regret that he did not learn to draw as an end in itself when he studied at the Central School in the 1960s. His nostalgia for the book is an exercise in nostalgia. A *Radio Times* "Humour Number" settled on a Parker Knoll chair beside the family hearth, insouciant from the sophistication and vulgarity of the outside world, offering an escape from the bombardment of too much photographic reality.

Among this week's contributors

ANNE BORN's translation of Karen Blixen's *Letters from Africa* was published earlier this year.

C. R. BOXER's books include *The Dutch Seaborne Empire 1600-1800*, 1965, and *Anglo-Dutch Wars of the 17th Century*, 1974.

ALAN BROWNJOHN's most recent collection of poems, *A Night in the Gazebo*, was published earlier this year.

STEFAN COLLINS is the author of *Liberalism and Society*, 1979.

PETER CONRAD's books include *Romantic Opera and Literary Form*, 1977, and *Imagining America*, 1980.

KEVIN CROSSLEY-HOLLAND's collection of poems include *The Rain Giver*, 1973.

ALEX DE JONGE is the author of *Dostoevsky and the Age of Intensity*, 1975.

VICKI FEAVER's collection of poems *Close Relatives* was published earlier this year.

KATE FLINT is a lecturer in English at the University of Bristol.

ROY FOSTER's *Lord Randolph Churchill: A Political Life* was published earlier this year.

CELINA FOX is Curator of Pictures, Prints and Drawings at the Museum of London.

RICHARD GRENIER is film critic of *Commentary*.

HUGH HAUGHTON is a lecturer in English at the University of York.

TONY HARRISON's new collection of poems, *Continuous* will be reviewed shortly in the TLS.

PETER HOLLAND's *The Ornament of Action: Text and Performance in Restoration Comedy* was published in 1979.

PETER KEMP's critical study *H. G. Wells and the Culminating Age* will be published next year.

J. P. KENYON is Professor of Modern History at the University of St Andrews. His books include *Revolution Principles*, 1977, and *Stuart England*, 1978.

J. MORDAUNT CROOK's most recent book *William Burges and the High Victorian Dream* was published earlier this year.

JANET MORGAN is the editor of *Richard Crossman's Diaries of a Cabinet Minister*, 1976-77, and *The Backbench Diaries of Richard Crossman*, 1981.

ANDREW MOTTON's long poem *Independence* is published this week.

DAVID NOXES is a lecturer in English at King's College, London.

GARRY O'CONNOR's most recent book is *The Pursuit of Perfection: A Life of Maggie Teyte*, 1980. His biography of Ralph Richardson will be published next year.

RICHARD OSBORNE is a contributor to *The Dictionary of Composers*, 1977, and *Opera on Record*, 1979.

ANTHONY QUINTON is President of Trinity College, Oxford. His books include *The Politics of Imperfection*, 1978, and *Francis Bacon*, 1980.

NORMAN SHRAPNEL's *A View of the Thames* was published in 1977.

FRANCES SPALDING's biography of Roger Fry was published last year.

RANDOLPH STOW's novels include *Visions*, 1980.

THOMAS SUTCLIFFE is a producer for BBC Radio.

CHRISTOPHER THORNE is Professor of International Relations at the University of Sussex. His books include *The United States, Britain and the War Against Japan 1941-1945*, 1978.

E. S. TURNER's most recent book is *Dear Old Blighty*, 1980.

STANLEY WELLS is General Editor of the Oxford Shakespeare.

ROBERT WISTRICH is currently a Fellow of the Institute of Advanced Studies, Jerusalem. His *Who's Who in Nazi Germany* will be published in the spring.

'Covering Islam'

Sir, - One may understand Edward W. Said's wounded feelings (Letters, November 27). A man charged with responsibility for guiding the studies of others must be uncomfortable when his methods are shown to be unscholarly. And that demonstration is unaffected by the bluster, the abuse, and the misrepresentations with which he endeavours to confuse the issue in his letter.

As Professor Said recognizes, despite his references to trivialization, the heart of the matter is the two examples which I gave in my review of *Covering Islam* (October 9) of his unscholarly methods. The first example concerned an article by Professor Edmund Bosworth. In my review I stated that Said saw the article in the *Los Angeles Times* of December 12, 1979, and that it was first published in *Newsday* on December 2, 1979. Although he never states that there are two articles Said is very likely to have left your readers with the impression that such is the case and that he has based his comments on one of them and that I based my criticism on the other. As it happens, before I wrote the review I ascertained from Bosworth that he had written one article only. Unless Said intends to claim that the editor of the *Los Angeles Times* is responsible for the publication of another article under Bosworth's name without the knowledge of the alleged author, we are talking about the same article. I have manufactured no evidence and falsified nothing; nor indeed, as Said well knows, was there ever any question that I had done so. Said's bolting-hole is firmly closed against him.

The most significant feature of Said's comment on the Bosworth episode in his letter is that, although he gives twice as many words to it as I did in my review and three times as many as he did in *Covering Islam*, he never attempts to justify his original statement which I quoted and of which I complained that it constituted misrepresentation of Bosworth's article. Readers will reasonably draw the conclusion that his silence indicates that he has no answer to my complaint.

The second example of Said's defective methods which I gave in my review concerned an editorial by Ernest Conine in the *Los Angeles Times* of December 10, 1979. Said does not attempt to deny that what Conine wrote was quite different from what Said claimed Conine meant but argues that his version is a legitimate interpretation of Conine's editorial. Since no other evidence of Conine's views is cited, Said's contention rests primarily upon what may be called the internal logic of the article. Said writes in his letter: "If Islam is underdeveloped and if the Revolution was a widespread revolt against the unsettling influences of Westernization, then it must be that in their Islamic hearts Iranians were more offended by specifically anti-Islamic acts like depriving 'holy men' of their subsidies than commonplaces, not specifically Islamic, offences like torture." Leaving aside the odd view of Islamic values which is enshrined in the latter part of the statement, the logic is clearly faulty; the conclusion does not follow from the propositions. Said hints at a second line of evidence about Conine's meaning, namely "the prevailing context in the United States". But this context can be no more than the sum of what Conine and others have written - in other words the argument is circular. Also it cannot bear upon the specific point in dispute.

Said's defence of "interpretation" is therefore, logically unsound. It is, of course, also another red herring. If Conine had wished to say that Iranians were less troubled by torture than by insults to their "holy men" there is no reason at all why he should not have done so. That he did not say it is a good reason for thinking that he did not intend to do so: if one wishes to deny this

straightforward interpretation one must have very much better reasons than Said has. His so-called interpretation is pure misrepresentation.
M. E. YAPP.
7 Woodstock Road North, St Albans, Hertfordshire.

'The Shogun Inheritance'

Sir, - I am very grateful for the generous review Louis Allen gave to *The Shogun Inheritance* by Michael Macintyre in your issue of October 30.

Would you permit me, however, to make one important point so as to avoid any misunderstanding? Although this book is directly related to a BBC Television series of the same name, in fact the author of the book, Michael Macintyre, took all the photographs specifically for the book and not one of them is a still from the television series and I regret that Dr Allen was under this impression.

ROBIN BAIRD-SMITH.
Collins Publishers, 14 St James's Place, London SW1A 1PS.

Goethe Anniversary

Sir, - It may be of interest to some of your readers to know that in commemoration of the one-hundred-and-fiftieth anniversary of the death of Goethe, the English Goethe Society is in 1982 offering a prize of £100 for the best translation into English verse of three of his poems; the judges will be D. J. Enright, Michael Hamburger, and B. A. Rowley. Those who wish to receive full details and rules of the competition should send a stamped addressed envelope to me as Honorary Secretary of the Society.

F. M. FOWLER.

Department of German, Queen Mary College, Mile End Road, London E1.

Children and Reading

Sir, - Gareth B. Matthews's interesting and suggestive article in your Children's Books supplement "Learning to dwell in possibility" (November 20) calls for some comment.

He is somewhat critical of Jean Piaget, but what Piaget was concerned with in his early work was to show that the child's world is an animistic and magical world - a world that even the adult writer of children's stories and poems is not always able to penetrate. I get the impression that Matthews believes the child's world is more like that of the adult. This comes out in his use of the philosophical notion of a propositional attitude to explain the child's approach to imaginative literature; and in his belief that learning how to move about attitudes to propositions, is learning how to dwell in possibility.

The whole concept of a propositional attitude is an abstract reflective one. Bertrand Russell who introduced this notion defined it as "believing, desiring, doubting, etc, that so-and-so is the case" (*An Inquiry Into Meaning and Truth*, 1940, p. 21). But the young child's approach to imaginative literature is often highly unreflective. In the more magical world of the child, there may be nothing incongruous in the statement "the cow jumped over the moon". In any case he may be unable to draw a sharp distinction between the fictitious and the real.

As Matthews fully realizes, the child's appreciation of a story does not merely depend upon his taking up the correct propositional attitudes, but also in assigning appropriate meanings to it. And these will

vary in accordance with the child's past experiences. Lewis Carroll in *Alice in Wonderland* gave his words a meaning which the child is unable to give, being unacquainted with relativity theory and the logical paradoxes. Similarly a child reading *Gulliver's Travels* will not usually take it for what it is, a savage satire on the social and political conditions of Swift's day.

Dwelling reflectively on his attitudes towards persons, places and things will not necessarily enable a child to appreciate better a story or a poem. This will largely depend on the framework of interpretation, often unconscious, which he brings to his reading.

WOLFE MAYES.
Institute of Advanced Studies,
Manchester Polytechnic, All Saints,
Manchester M15 6BH.

'The Monstrous Races'

Sir, - T. A. Shippey's notice of John Block Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* (November 13) invites the thought that the descriptions and depictions of strange creatures of the western tradition may bear comparison with some of those that have emerged outside Europe.

In the *Shan-hai ching* (Classic of the Mountains and the Lakes), whose parts date from the fourth century BCE to the fourth century of the present era, we possess a descriptive text of holy mountains and sites and the strange creatures and divine spirits that may be encountered there. It has been suggested that the text originated as a set of captions to paintings of the sites and their features. Whether or not this theory may be accepted, editions of the work have included illustrations from at least the thirteenth century. These are based on the text itself and have been reproduced by Chinese printing houses at frequent intervals, most recently in 1980. They include a creature that may be compared with the *Blennyae* that you show, and there are other examples, such as pygmies, which Pliny might have recognized. Some of these illustrations have been reproduced in John A. Goodall, *Heaven and Earth: 120 album leaves from a Ming Encyclopedia* (London: Lund Humphries, 1979). By contrast with the treatment of these strange creatures in the medieval tradition of Europe, questions of a theological nature did not arise from this aspect of Chinese mythology.

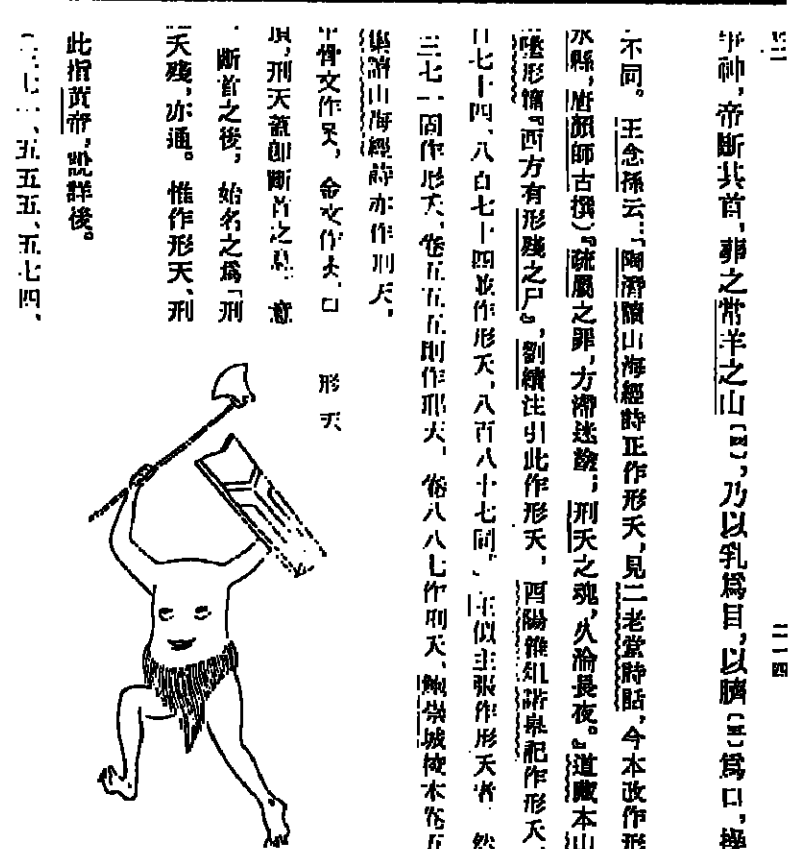
MICHAEL LOEWE.
University of Cambridge, Faculty of Oriental Studies, Sidgwick Avenue, Cambridge.

The Ethics of Abortion

Sir, - If Martin W. Helgesen is as well read in the literature on the abortion issue as he claims to be (Letters, November 20), it is surprising that he has not learnt more from it. He still appears to believe that the central question in this issue is whether fetuses are human. The inadequacies of this construction of the problem have been exposed by others sufficiently often that I felt it necessary only to rehearse them briefly in *Abortion and Moral Theory*.

In the only morally neutral sense of "human" an individual is human just in case it is a member of *homo sapiens*. Though it is still a nice question whether or not a fetus is a *homo sapiens*, Helgesen also contends that pro-abortionists must bear the burden of showing that (some or all) fetuses lack moral standing, since otherwise permitting abortion would be toleration of homicide. It is equally plausible to argue that anti-abortionists must bear the burden of showing that (some or all) fetuses have moral standing, since otherwise forbidding abortion would be interference in the autonomy of women. The wiser course is to reject both arguments and to relegate talk of the burden of proof to the law courts where it is more at home. In the abortion debate the initial presumption favours neither side.

Finally, Helgesen takes issue with my observation that the fetus is parasitic upon its mother. A parasite is "an organism that lives on or in another and draws its nourishment therefrom" (*Stedman's Medical Dictionary*). The parasite need not be of a different species from the host. This "technical" sense of the word is related to the mother as a parasite to host. The point is a small



This strange creature forms one of the illustrations to an edition of the Chinese classic, the *Shan-hai ching*, referred to in Michael Loewe's letter on this page.

one, but Helgesen would have saved himself from this mistake, as well as from the others he committed, if he had bothered to read my book before attacking its contentions by criticizing Peter Singer's review of it.
L. W. SUMNER.
4 Southmoor Road, Oxford.

'The Terror Network'

Sir, - According to Jillian Bocker's review of October 23, Claire Sterling's book *The Terror Network* asserts that my father was a "fascist-turned-communist". This is ridiculous as well as offensive. In 1940 he was a boy of fourteen, and as soon as he was old enough he joined up as a soldier in the Italian army under the Allied Forces. That was in 1944. So much for the "ample evidence" with which the author supports her case.
CARLO FITZGERALD FELTRINELLI.
Via Andegari 6, I-20121 Milan.

A George Eliot Manuscript

Sir, - My publication under the title "A New George Eliot Manuscript" in *George Eliot: Centenary Essays and an Unpublished Fragment*, edited by A. Smith (London: Vision Press, 1980), pp. 9-20, has drawn the MS to the attention of Mr P. J. Croft, Fellow and Librarian of King's College, Cambridge, who has pointed out that comparison with autograph letters by John Walter Cross in the British Library (Add MSS 54338 and 58436) shows that the first page is in Cross's hand.

The fifteen lines on p 9 of the MS are in a hand which remains to be identified.

The following mis-readings in the printed text of this paragraph need correcting:

"he was brash enough to raise the oaken panelling of his pew" should read: "he was weak enough to raise the oaken panelling of his pew";
and "he had not 'five inch' from his own deed" should read: "he had not 'gone back' from his own deed".

WILLIAM BAKER.
Pitzer College, Claremont, California 91711.

The whip hand

The Englishwoman and her Horse
BBC TV

Candida Lycett Green's programme assembled an interesting collection of horse freaks: from the flower of the Heythrop to some very humble horse owners; indeed, the further down the scale you went the nicer they became; grand horse-owning is not entirely free of pomposity, as a lovely Russian word for exhibitionism, *snobizm*, ported by little or no substance.

You cannot expect a single programme to exhaust the rich subject of English ladies and horses; but there was one conspicuous omission, namely men. We witnessed plenty of that kind of loving cheerfulness that English women are, actually quite capable of when there are no men featured. In the programme admittedly featured men in one role; as supporters of endless streams of pound notes for their women to buy and maintain the animals with. In this respect there was nothing to separate the bloody but unowned occupant of

a mobile home from the owner of a pretty house near Burford.

But in one way men are central to the Englishwoman and her horse, which serves as both an object of her love and a medium for her revenge. Although we were not shown the fact, the whole horse business gives women a wonderful chance to shout at men. They start by bullying small boys, and taking insane risks at pony club camp, and if they are lucky, graduate to standing in the middle of a grown-up riding school and maintaining a constant stream of bad tempered instruction. The nearest that the horse life was a Lancashire police lady using her horse for crowd control and - telling young football hooligans - and other kinds of Euroyob to stop biting their nails.

What the programme did provide was wonderful parallel glance at a certain kind of English motherhood, in which a lady separated a mare from her foal with all the briskness of a mother delivering her child to his first term at boarding school.

It was rich, as they say, in contrasts. It brought out the true horror of the kind of lady who tells you who made her riding clothes - though it is by no means certain that she ought to be wearing Daddy's hunt boots. On the other hand there were some very good stories, notably a retired housemaid, a friend of mounted Catherine Leroux, who had come to riding quite late in life. Her horse did not exactly look like patent safety, but she had happily taken more falls than Jojo O'Neill or John Lawrence in his heyday without serious damage.

The programme was not wonderfully well made. The narrator's measured diction jangled the nerves a bit, and the camera angles were remarkably boring with lots of heads, talking and someone talking sponsored with close-ups to observe the clenching hands of someone talking about the loss of a very special four-footed friend, and so on. Cheap stuff this, but what can you expect with the licence fee so low?

Alex de Jonge

Bad us, good them

By Richard Grenier

GILBERT ADAIR:
Hollywood's Vietnam
From *The Green Berets* to *Apocalypse Now*
190pp. Proteus. £7.95.
0 9047186 9

The Vietnam war has not been considered a fit subject for entertainment in the cinema. If it had not been for the dogged, Stars-and-Stripes patriotism of John Wayne (whose *The Green Berets* was a commercial success even after the Tet offensive of 1968), and for two films made many years after the fall of Saigon (Michael Cimino's *The Deer Hunter* and Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*), Gilbert Adair would not have had a book at all. Discussions of these three films, plus an introductory chapter on "The War Story Tradition", constitute four of his book's six chapters. In the event, *Hollywood's Vietnam* is not much of a book. There are 168 pages of text, with perhaps half that space devoted to pictures; and there is a twenty-two-page bibliography (in large type) of seventy-five films, most of them disastrous commercial failures, or critical failures, or both, and usually having only the most tenuous connection with the war. Thus we are left with three expansive, incoherent, opinionated film reviews organized around slogans from Grant Park in Chicago in 1968.

Gilbert Adair says modestly in his introduction that his work "has, of course, no pretensions to being a book on the Vietnam war". But if it is not about the Vietnam war what is it about? It proceeds from a set of comfortable and pious certitudes about the war, such as that the United States was committing an "unprecedented obscenity", whereas the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese were virtual saints. Criticism of the communist forces (as in *The Deer*

Hunter) either embodies "Occidental fears of the yellow race", or constitutes "an insult not only to the heroic struggles of the Vietnamese people but to the audience's intelligence".

Although Adair complacently awards gold stars and black marks to films according to degree of rigour with which they condemn American intervention, no film in fact matches up to the required degree of ferocity. *The Deer Hunter* (a film I do not like much myself) is of course Adair's *hère mine* - he finds the singing of "God Bless America" in the tragic closing scene "trampy". *Apocalypse Now*, because it shows Americans engaged in wanton killing, is much more to his liking, but even here he objects to the note of "tragic grandeur" at the end, the "meditation on the eternal verities of good and evil".

In Karl Reisz's *Dog Soldiers* (a very good film in my view, and profoundly hostile to the war), Adair criticizes a minor incident as a "ridiculously light touch of a society's decline". The film is "fatally compromised" by Reisz's view of the war as a "trauma", an approach which is simply not good enough for Adair. American society is rotten to the core and he will have nothing less. He seems angry, too, with every American film made during the war, summarizing some of them only to note resentfully that the war is not even mentioned.

Mr Adair is scornful of filmmakers who know only about cinema and considers himself to be highly knowledgeable on South-East Asian and American affairs. But this book takes virtually no account of anything that has happened in South-East Asia since 1975; so much so that it seems quite antique - it is as if the attitudes in it had been stored in a time capsule. Americans, after all, have now had years of watching on their television screens the desperate lengths to which Vietnamese "boat people" still go to escape the

earthly paradise of Ho Chi Minh City. The *New York Times* (a great opponent of the war) has continued to publish articles about the present "Vietnam Gaiety". Pol Pot, given his chance, exterminated perhaps half the population of Cambodia (an impressive score even by Nazi or Stalinist standards).

Mr Adair does not seem to be a great reader of books, but he should be told that Jean Lacouture, the great French expert on Indo-China (who had such a huge influence on American writers on the subject) has confessed that out of partisanship he deliberately misled his readers on the nature of the regime in North Vietnam. Frances Fitzgerald, whose *Fire in the Lake*, with its high capture over the "cleansing flame of revolution", won every prize in sight when it appeared in 1972, was asked recently by the *Los Angeles Times* to write an article giving her views on present-day Vietnam. Her reported answer that she had not sorted out her thinking implied that the rapacity, embarrassingly, might have faded.

None of this proves that the American intervention in Vietnam was a good idea. (My own view, from quite early on, was that it was far beyond the nation's capacities, not worth the price in blood or money.) But it does make it look as if the canonization of the adversary was, in a word, grotesque.

One of the many things that made the whole Vietnam venture so tragic, and pathetic, is that President Lyndon Johnson was so proud, until the last stage, of being able to fight a limited war without "rousing the public ire" (the phrase is Robert McNamara's). The sound of the bugle, said Johnson, had ended US social progress too often in the past: the Spanish-American War had cut short the Progressive movement; the First World War, Wilson's New Freedom; the Second World War, FDR's New Deal; the Korean War,

Truman's Fair Deal. No bugle was going to end LBJ's Great Society. Johnson would not raise taxes to pay for the war. He made no stirring calls to "pay any price, bear any burden", offered no "blood, sweat and tears". One of the more obvious lessons of Vietnam - hard to miss now - is that democratic nations cannot fight wars without rousing the public ire.

But events in 1979 and 1980 caused a sharp reaction against the demoralization and self-vilification that had followed the Vietnam defeat. The Tehran hostage crisis saw motorcyclists roaring along American highways with buttons reading "Fuck Iran". Teenagers sported T-shirts bearing the American eagle and with the legend, "Don't Mess With America". Ronald Reagan, during his Presidential campaign, called the Vietnam War a "noble cause" and didn't seem to lose a vote. As President he presented a huge new defence budget that passed the US Senate by a majority of ninety-four to one.

This time it was only a matter of weeks before Hollywood began to reflect the new national mood. Sylvester Stallone's *Nighthawks* follows the Alexander's line on international terrorism almost to the letter. The James Bond *For Your Eyes Only* (a United Artists film despite Mr Bond's nationality) has rediscovered the Soviet menace; the film is crawling with KGB agents and Cuban and East German hit men. But most pungent of all, the current comedy hit, *Stripes*, shows a day-labourer, Mr Russo, declaring that "a straight day job is death to a writer" and blesses the fraternal ghetto for letting him live off its scraps while he was hard at work watching those hundreds of movies: he was fed, he acknowledges, by the snack-bar in a bath-house on St Mark's Place in New York.

The acknowledgments to *The Celluloid Closet* merit inspection because they establish the moral style and stance of what follows. They sum up the author's self-congratulation and his self-deception; they exemplify radical chic passing itself off as fraternalism. While dramatizing himself as a reject of the status quo, discarded by the mainstream, sustained by his fellow initiates in suffering, Mr Russo is careful to mention the expensive intercontinental forays he managed while researching: those 500 films were distributed between six cities - London, New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Washington and Amsterdam. The ghetto-dweller is, after all, a jet-setter. A yet more telling admission occurs in his introduction, when - embattled as ever - Mr Russo is describing his campaign against slurs and put-downs. For three years, he was persecuted with the same dumb queries about his work. "At dinner in Manhattan and on pocket lines in Berkeley, on the beach at Fire Island and on lecture tours in the Midwest, everyone had the same question when the subject of this book was raised in conversation." The question itself doesn't matter; what does is Mr Russo's itinerary, and his ingenious conversion of oppression into publicity and profit ("this book", we're told, "grew from his lecture on homosexuality in the movies, which has been covered by major television and print media in the United States and Europe"). And the middle-headedness which can string together venues and occasions as incompatible as sunning yourself on the beach, clenching your fist at a rally, and merchandizing your torments to a lecture audience which has paid to listen to you.

Here, in a single sentence, Mr Russo has embodied the shame of the gay movement's capitulation to radical chic. The provocation of social and psychological change becomes both tourism and profiteering: the conservative oppressors of the Midwest sign up as paying customers for Mr Russo's travelling harangue. Demonstrating - always alleged to be a fair-weather ally - for the frivolous fellow-travellers, Mr Russo is so portentous as to be of radical chic of your sun-tan. Activism and relaxation, making propaganda and making money, are conjoined in giddy indiscriminate. Such is the dubious destiny of gay liberation which, instead of engineering a revolution, has promoted a consumer boom, sponsoring an alternative economy of Malibu-protected bath-houses, druggy discos and boat boutiques, all conjured into being by the disposable incomes of men who have elaborated their sexual orientation into a compulsively and conspicuously consuming "life-style".

It is this treason with which the German film-maker Rosa von Praunheim flouted the American movement in 1972, and which Mr Russo's book epitomizes. His dead metaphors wince so much. He commends film-makers who are "openly gay", pleads for the greater "visibility" of homosexuals in movies, and argues that Hollywood's way of suppressing homosexuality was to render it invisible. Openness is thus equated with visibility. To confess or to come out involves making yourself conspicuous, and conspicuousness - as Veblen declared in his theory of an economy catering to a leisured class - is the quality which emblemizes affluence. The affluent are those who consume conspicuously. Mr Russo's gays have modelled their private lives on their economic habits: they are honest because they are open, which means self-advertising. They wear their hearts on their sleeves, and their carnal preferences on their belts, exteriorizing their requirements by positioning their key rings to the left or to the right. Self-declaration is thus identical with self-publicizing - another instance of radical sexuality's enthrallment to a consumer economy.

To be "openly gay" is - as in Mr Russo's case, with his lecture tours and his exposure by "major television and print media" - to make a living out of it. The visibility for which Mr Russo agitates throughout *The Celluloid Closet* is the proper goal not of a revolutionary but of a promotional publicist, committed to getting his product on display. The forensic triumph of Mr Russo's treatise is therefore a concluding "filmography" an index which confers visibility on various reluctant or implausible candidates - Montgomery Clift oedipally adoring John Wayne in *Red River*; Judith Anderson purring over Rebecca's nightie; Terence Stamp inciting an erotic commotion among the tars in *Billy Budd*; Glenn Ford and George Macready plighting their troth in *Gladiator*; Bert Lahr as the panfished lion in *The Wizard of Oz*. The shrill and conspiratorial tone of these annotations impugns Mr Russo's case. In *X, Y and Zee*, he announces, "Elizabeth Taylor does it with Susanah York", the "it" fairly crying out for italics. And his aside on Ken Russell's *Valentino* flicks a limp wrist at his enquires, "Well, was he or wasn't he?" Being an invitation to membership of an exclusive club, the detection of homosexuality is achieved with the help of one's friends, who are already members: thus Mr Russo's index includes *Diary of a Mad Housewife*, in which the relevant character is the one "played by Frank Langella, according to everyone who saw it". This means, I presume, that Mr Russo hasn't seen it, but is content to rely on word of mouth.

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The index which concludes the book is, like the introduction and acknowledgements which open it, a mockery of Mr Russo's professed principles, since the glee with which it points the finger evinces what he deplores as "the complicity, gay, lesbian and straight, of the closet mentality". The jubilation unsuppressed in the research about travesties - for the frivolous fellow-travellers - of radical chic of your sun-tan. Activism and relaxation, making propaganda and making money, are conjoined in giddy indiscriminate. Such is the dubious destiny of gay

Conspicuous liberation

By Peter Conrad

VITO RUSSO:
The Celluloid Closet
Homosexuality in the Movies
276pp. Harper and Row. £7.95.
0 8 337019 0

The oppressed may be entitled to a saving self-righteousness, but it's preposterous of Vito Russo to present his research for *The Celluloid Closet* - which consisted in attending "more than 500 films in six cities" - as a protracted spiritual travail. "This book", he announces with the urbane elegance of the elect, "put a lot of decent people through hell". But the hell to which Mr Russo subjected his luckless intimates turns out to be an eternity of hell, not an existential agony: "most of them hold responsible jobs during daylight hours and have no call to be awake at four in the morning, listening to stories about sissies in the 1930s". Though this detail makes these nocturnal sessions of consciousness-raising sound no more than marathons of bad-mouthing, Mr Russo is adamant about the strenuous intellect and self-purging analysis entailed, and is especially grateful to a certain Arnie Kantrowitz, whose contribution to the book was his empathy and clarity: he "knows suffering when he sees it". Desperate as he is to establish his credentials as society's abused and excluded conscience, threatened with starvation if he won't give in and enrol as a day-labourer, Mr Russo declares that "a straight day job is death to a writer" and blesses the fraternal ghetto for letting him live off its scraps while he was hard at work watching those hundreds of movies: he was fed, he acknowledges, by the snack-bar in a bath-house on St Mark's Place in New York.

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with "I think I found one!" - a phrase which, even on the page, re-echoes in an altitudinous camp octave.

Mr Russo writes execrably, and seems to do so not by incompetence or misadventure, but dogmatically - on purpose. In a sentence like his comment on *Madchen in Uniform* - "the film shows an understanding... of the dynamic of women relating to women on their own terms" - the awkward solidity of the prose and the recourse to a mechanistic metaphor vouchsafe his integrity, his sober trust in our contemporary psychiatric version of puritanism, which brings to our relations with those we love or have sex with the same dutiful anxiety once reserved for the Calvinist soul's relation with its God. This grim seriousness wouldn't be objectionable if it were consistently maintained, but the style deflates it, as in the phrases: "I've quoted from the index, by getting the giggles, and beneath the pretence of earnestness it's disclosed that this therapeutic self-scouring is in complicity trivial as the coarseness of old, bad movies."

The Celluloid Closet is a compendious gable, lacking critical subtlety and patently ignorant of any culture outside the companionable dark of those art cinemas in London, New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Washington and Amsterdam. For instance, Mr Russo writes about the male alliances in Howard Hawks' westerns or their later urban correlates like *Midnight Cowboy* as if these ambiguous partnerships were an invention of Hollywood rather than an inheritance from the epic narrative of men without women, exploring and subduing a perilous frontier, which dominates American literature from Fenimore Cooper to Hemingway. Leslie Fiedler inaugurated the study of this fraternal eroticism in his essay on Huck Finn's voyage with nigger Jim, but Mr Russo is more concerned with nudges, winks and snide aspersions - Ryan O'Neal cuddling a grizzled William Holden in *The Wild Riders*, Joanne Woodward speculating about the likelihood of Paul Newman's eloping with Robert Redford - than with such indwelling and abiding cultural motives. The mythical victory of this section of his book, denouncing the American cult of masculinity, is the pillorying of the totem of that cult, John Wayne, as what Mr Russo calls a "denim faggot", a cowboy more fit for a leather bar than for the wide open range. Hence the inclusion of a still from *Red River*, with Montgomery Clift gazing at Wayne in tender adulation, or the quote from *Midnight Cowboy*, when Jon Voight in his ruse's drag-naked roundabout with Robert Redford - "with such indwelling and abiding cultural motives. 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Encounters with the Kosmical

By Hugh Haughton

MARGARET GLYNNE LLOYD:
William Carlos Williams's *Paterson*
304pp. Associated University Presses.
£9.
0 8386 2152 X

DON BYRD:
Charles Olson's *Maximus*
204pp. University of Illinois Press.
0 252 00779 4

"America demands a poetry that is bold, modern, and all-surrounding and Kosmical as she is herself". At least Walt Whitman demanded it (the words come from his "Democratic Vistas") and this came to much the same thing. By asserting loudly that the poetic imagination was more than equal to America, and by showing his awesome capacity not to be overawed by his promiscuous awe at it all, Whitman launched the modern American long poem, and set a formidable precedent for lyric poetry.

The long poem in English has been an almost exclusively American preserve in this century - though its tradition of the miscellaneous, spreadeagled lyric epic, from Pound's *Cantos* through Williams's *Paterson* and on to the work of Zukovskiy, Olson, Ginsberg, Dorn, and Ashbery, has scarcely been recognized this side of the Atlantic, least of all by the academy, which has preferred the compact, self-contained, and civilized lyrics of poets like Lowell and Ransom to the "bold, modern, and all-surrounding and Kosmical" tradition of the successors to Whitman and Williams. Such a tradition seems light years away from the values of recent English poetry, with its well-advertised distaste for the "experimental" and, of course, the "cosmic" (let alone with a capital K).

It's sad, therefore, that these two critical books about the most substantial poems of this tradition - Margaret Glynn Lloyd's study of *Paterson* and Don Byrd's of *Maximus* - are so dull and so irrelevant. Both books are nothing if not academic - what Olson curiously called "professor stuff". They don't show the first idea of how poetry works or of what reading a poem is like; and the shadow of the Blatant Beast of the PhD thesis falls heavily across them. It is true that much American poetry is programmatic, and can often seem like a perpetually rewritten manifesto for itself, but it is a critical disaster when programmes are substituted for poems, and poetic intentions for poetic acts - as happens in both these books.

Lloyd and Byrd not only do not judge the effectiveness of poetry, but their expositions of Williams's and Olson's "open" and self-defining theories of poetic composition do not provide any possibility of *falsifiability*, any criterion of *falsifiability*. For these two commentators *Maximus* and *Paterson* not only do not fail as poems in any respect, they could not, since any kind of muddle, pretentiousness, chaos, or fragmentariness, can be justified as "of the process". When Don Byrd states that "the usefulness of Olson's work is that it proposes the impossible and dwells in it", or Margaret Lloyd that "at any given moment *Paterson's* organization resembles the format of the modern daily press, which is simply the presentation of heterogeneous items in juxtaposition", they both in their different ways imply that whatever is (in the poems) is right; trivial considerations such as "impossibility", or the randomness of "juxtaposition", go by the board, and poetic discourse is left on its own, as *sui generis* and unjudgeable, the poet as God's replacement or deputy. This is not only a particularly deceptive approach to Williams and Olson, but a dangerously dull one: every reader must be acutely conscious of the wavering degree of success, the roughness and unevenness, present in poems like *Paterson* and *Maximus*.

On the face of it, *Paterson* and *Maximus* have much in common. Conceived and written contemporaneously, both bear the marks of being their

writer's magnum opus - culminating portraits of America. Robert Lowell's description of *Paterson* as "anti-*Cantos* written in America" could be applied to Olson's work too. As Olson said, Pound gave them both the "methodological clue: the RAG-BAG", while Williams gave "the lead on the local". Both poems are expansive, sprawling, experimental; conceived on the type-writer but organized with fluid, democratic lyricism; at the same time a portrait of a particular man (a kind of familiar, compound self-portrait of the poet in each case), and a particular place. Geography, history, autobiography are jumbled together - dreams, facts, newspaper-clippings, statistics, personal observations and jubilant or indignant affirmations, all in a very American grain. Neither of these grandiose, casual projects was finished - or, in all probability, finishable. Both, like every epic since the *Prelude*, are thoroughly self-reflexive works, as much about the process of their own composition as about the objective worlds they chose to represent (they are as topographical as topographical) and both are ultimately highly questionable as well as intimately self-questioning works.

But they are also radically different. Olson is much more pedagogical, erudite, esoteric, and Poundian - even in his attitude to provincial Gloucester. Consequently his sense of rhythm and lyric form, though as unpredictable and improvisatory as Williams's, is much more assertive, cutting and intractable: Williams's line is elastic, fluent, relaxed and responsive. *Maximus* is less read, less readable, and less humanly appealing as a result. Both poems look like "culture talk", and each "actually and solely, and quite exactly" offer nothing but the path itself, as Olson wrote of *Paterson*. But there's a lot of culture-talk too, and that dates faster than the paths; this is likely to affect the future status of the compulsively pedagogical Olson.

The two books under review give caricatured versions of the respective weaknesses of Olson and Williams. Under Margaret Lloyd's conscientious scrutiny, *Paterson* becomes as dull as ditchwater - a plodding provincial epic based on very vague sociological accounts of the city (by Mumford, Spengler, and others), written in a worthy pedestrian style which is beyond reproach, a modern equivalent of *The Excursion*, perhaps, mixing plain moral reflections with a diffused sense of personal ecstasy. She sums up her argument like this: "Accordingly as we have seen, the content, measure, and overall organization of *Paterson* is a product of a direct contract and engagement with the factors, the people, and the general dynamics of his environment as well as the new relativistic concepts of reality with which Williams became familiar." She talks about the poem's search for a redeeming language, but hers redeems nothing and is unredeemably blank. She talks about Williams's "critical thinking in relation to the poem" and concludes it "has much in common with modern genre theory" - as if that meant anything, or could justify the profundity of Williams's conceptions. Her initial world is one in which everything Williams does has "much in common" with what other writers or authorities of some kind have written: she defends Williams by saying he is like X or Y, and she picks her way among the critics, repeating "as X has said", "as Y argued", or "but Z asserted", creating a mosaic of quotations from other people, or from Williams's work, to build up an impression of terrible consistency, even unanimity.

The only virtue of this technique of seeing similarities and parallels everywhere, and of sewing them together in the grey patchwork quilt of the book, is that some of the other voices seem real; above all, Williams's own quirkily intelligent, defiant, genially outrageous remarks shine out from the argument in which they are inserted. As the author puzzlingly remarks a propos of something else, his voice is "unintentionally audible", and provides the only redeeming leaven in a leaden book. There is grave danger at the best of times that Williams will be seen as a dull, "sincere" poet, or a drastically stupid one (as Winters and Jarrell

claimed) - and this pious book does him a profound disservice by making him seem both.

Don Byrd's book is diametrically opposite - but equally a caricature of the least appealing aspect of its subject. He writes as if learnedly expounding an unreasonable, archaic, mystical treatise on some weird Orphic mystery religion. He has a certain philosophical sophistication and writes a strenuous and abstract prose of some intensity about the historical, metaphysical, and philosophical programmes incorporated in the *Maximus*. But what has all this to do with Olson? Byrd comments on *Maximus IV* that "the whole thrust of cultural movement from Condwaland to Gloucester is a factor of Maximus's physiology which the poem proposes to contain in the divine inertia of the new coherence". And a little later that "the protogonic reality in the *Maximus* does not descend from heaven but rises directly from the genetic power of earth, to the morphological fact of the hero". Byrd claims that Olson demands "A discipline of attention as rigorous and demanding as cosmology or physics", and so does his own book - but its brand of cosmology and physics looks increasingly wilful, and frankly batty, after a while. At one stage we hear that "like the Memphite theologians on whom he draws, Maximus runs the risk of paradox in accounting for the absolute primordiality of both Pith and Nut", and later that "the self need only become to itself an image of transcendent reality to avoid the encounter with death". He also tells us that "Olson's revision of Whitmanian democracy is to propose a ritualistic practice in which everyone is reborn as Jupiter". I do not think I will be alone in being unlightened by these claims and in thinking they cast as little light on *Maximus* as on anything else.

By concentrating entirely on Olson's scheme of history, his desire to re-establish an ecstatic, initiatic cosmology, his nostalgia for the second millennium BC, his belief in the being of objects, his commitment to Herodotus' kind of history that equates myths and facts, Byrd emphasizes the megalomania of Olson's ambition to undo all of history since the late Pleistocene in order to restore man's primary relation to the world. Byrd says that Olson treats the evidence of history "not unlike a lay-out for a reading of tarot-cards or an astrological chart", but he doesn't seem to find this either odd or alarming. By isolating the esotericism of Olson, and by refusing to give it any kind of historical or political context, he turns the poem into a gigantically eccentric and pedantic arcanum. Olson is made to sound like a world-historical John Cowper Powys, a lone, demented Jungian lecturer reinventing ancient religions, archetypes, the Great Mother, the eternal feminine (again), the "heroic principle", and other Mysteries Galore. Byrd expounds *Maximus* itself as if it were an ancient theological classic - gigantic, heretical fossil, miraculously lodged in the 1950s, or simply a monument of lunatic speculation.

Of course Olson does form part of the twentieth-century tradition of speculative poetic history which includes Spengler and Yeats, and he is committed to some Whiteheadian, Jungian, pre-Socratic cosmology. But the colloquial, the local, the unpredictable, the Olson of "go contrary, go sing", the man who has to learn "the simplest things last", who valued the naked eye, who became the historian of his community, the obsessive geographer of a particular place - all this Byrd misses. Among other things, *Maximus* is a splendid junk-yard of objects and memories and linguistic experiments. It is what Olson made of his own place and history which is impressive; and it is the opening sections of *Maximus*, alongside *Call Me Ishmael*, and the poetry of the late 1940s that represent his most important work. Thereafter, though sporadically recapturing the brilliance of *The Prunellas* and *King-fisher*, Olson forgot his audience, the facts of present history, and the discipline of communication. In fact he nearly turned himself into the kind of Kosmic Pedagogue that Don Byrd explicates so unconvincingly in his pious commentary.

Bathing at Glymenopoulo

Lotophagi. I can believe it: first moment ashore the heat stunned us - a lavish blast and the stink of horses. Then it was *Mister. Mister.* Captain McKenzie - bathing girls round from the beach, white towels and parasols weaving through gun-carriages, crates and saddlery lined on the quay to pelt us with flowers. *Want Captain McKenzie? I give you good times.* But we rode away, eyes-front and smiling, pursued until the Majestic gates.

Men to the grounds, officers one to a cool high-ceilinged room - mine with a balcony looking down to the lake. There were pelicans clambering carefully in and out and in, never still, wrecking the stagnant calm, fighting, and shaking their throats with a flabby rattle. Otherwise, peace - the cedar layered in enormous green-black slabs and shading tents on the lawn; the horses only a rumour - stamping and spluttering out by the kitchen garden.

Each morning we rode early to Christmas Hill - two hours of dressage in dusty circuits then home with the sun still low. For the rest, time was our own - no readers, no news from France, but delirious boredom: polo some evenings, and long afternoons bathing at Glymenopoulo. I was, I have you by heart, giggling and stumbling up from the breakers into my photograph, one thin hand pressed to your cheek, your knee-length, navy-blue costume puckered and clinging. I singled you out

day after day after day - to swim with, to dawdle arm in arm on the beach as the furious sun sank, and later to hear your pidgeon whispers dancing in waterfront cafes: *You not like anyone. Gentling than other Captain McKenzies.* *You not like others - your lemon-smelling hair loose and brushing my mouth, your bracelets clinking, and languorous slow waltzes twirling us round and round in the smoky half-light. Luck.*

I kept telling myself. *Luck. It will end - but the lazy days stretched into five weeks, six, and then we were riding out on a clear pastel-blue morning to Christmas Hill as ever.* And half-way, at Kalia, stopped at our watering place - a date-grove fringing the pool, and the whole platoon fanned in a crescent to drink. I was dismounted, leading my horse over packed sand, empty-headed and waving flies from my face when the firing began. Ten shots,

perhaps - flips and smacks into date-trunks or puffing the sand and nobody hurt. But we charged - all of us thinking *At last. Action at last*, as our clumsy light brigade wheeled under the trees and away up a steady slope. I was far left, drawing my sword with a stupid high-pitched shout as we laboured through silvery mirage lakes. They were waiting ahead - Senussi, no more than a dozen, their gypsy silhouettes crouching and slinking back into stones as we breasted the rise.

The end of the world. A sheer wall falling hundreds of feet to a haze of yellow scrub. I wrenched myself round, sword dropped, head low, to a dead teetering halt as our line staggered, and buckled, and broke in a clattering slide. I can hear it again - the panicking whinnies, shouts, and the rush of scree where they shambled off into space. It has taken three days to bury them - one for the trek to the valley floor, one to scratch their ranks of graves, one to return.

There is little the same. At six we have curfew now: I am writing this after dark on my knee in the School of Instruction grounds, in a tent. I cannot sleep - sirens disturb me, blurring up from the harbour. Those are the ships from Gallipoli, unloading their trail of stretchers to the Majestic, where you will be waiting, Iras, I know, stopped outside the gates, high-heeled just as you were, with your hair fluffed out after swimming, repeating your tender sluttish call, *Want Captain McKenzie? I give you good times,*

Andrew Motion

Giving Thanks

Late last night on 77th I waited to watch the Macy mammoths get inflated and listen to bleary-eyed children cheer when Kermit's leg or Snoopy's limp left ear came out of their collapse as gas was blown through each sagged limb now magically regrown.

Each mammoth strains beneath its weighted net straining for the sky it can't have yet, impatient to be loosed out of the dark over the browning trees of Central Park.

From yesterday I still can feel you blow your love all through my body like some hellum that restores my true proportions, head to toe, and lifts my body skywards; when I come I'm out of the sandbagged nets and soar away into release and my Thanksgiving Day!

Tony Harrison

Stepping Out

Stepping out from under mother's Protection at five or fifty Up the ever-so-nasty wet Miles of tarmac to the moor Bold to cross it though his short Legs, he saw, were trembling. He arrived at the wind-worsted heather Out of reach of her voice, whether Raised in anger or muted In consolation. These were forbidden Tracts, so remote from mother's suburb, And what wonderful courage this was!

To have even started out was Appalling audacity, loading His belongings without her help, Taking boots, map and compass And creeping out to the door . . . Could this truly be himself? And could this invincible dawn be Raining, as he set off, when she Had predicted a sunny day with her? It scared him. It soothed him knowing How surely he would be creeping back When the day was over.

And he could not tell if he might Be prouder of having defied Mother's warnings, or of guessing How deeply he would defer again To her, in the end . . . Down there below, The voices of the crowd cried amazement That mother's own particular Weakling had gone so far; And the little voice here at his side Said the venturing out in dread And the going back from fear Were both attributable to her.

Alan Brownjohn

Neenie

in F.I.M. Crossley-Holland

Under the cowl, out on Scolt Head, The swell and swash are inching their way back. The water picks up pebbles, razor shells, Birds' small bleached bones and witches' purses; It toys with them, cries over them, And the legendary wave embraces them.

The tide returning: each wave and whisker, Everything forged into one force, A fusion with one meaning and purpose. But I think you are going farther, Ancient shuffler, at the fire now, flushed By this last blaze before going to bed.

Out of the dark they come at a knobbled wave, Processions unblemished and undeterred By time's strictures. Here is the hall At Oakwell: The chimney always roars like this: Frank is still up in the organ gallery, Puffing his cigar, blowing out another hymn.

The wind, more wind, and the cottage Rocks like a boat, quite safe, out at sea. Remember the train we took up to Wengen When you were six and I was sixty? It rocks, nurse, it rocks. I love this nursery. Kevin, have you met my pregnant sister? And now there is rain, ripping against the window (Long since painted into its frame) Behind the curtains of faded red velvet. What will become of the passion flowers? Still, the borders of this tapestry are teeming With forget-me-nots. I had three proposals . . .

It goes on and on. You make associations As children and poets do, bony fingers Clamped to the sill now, eyes watering: Not only the tide flowing and gathering up As it goes, not only time defused, But for itself a parade of whatever mattered

And for whatever reason, a statement Risen clear of interest and argument. I listen and think you are telling something Greater than its parts, a breath and sum Of life itself, the egg dispossessed. Grandmother, sleep, and sleep in peace.

Kevin Crossley-Holland

